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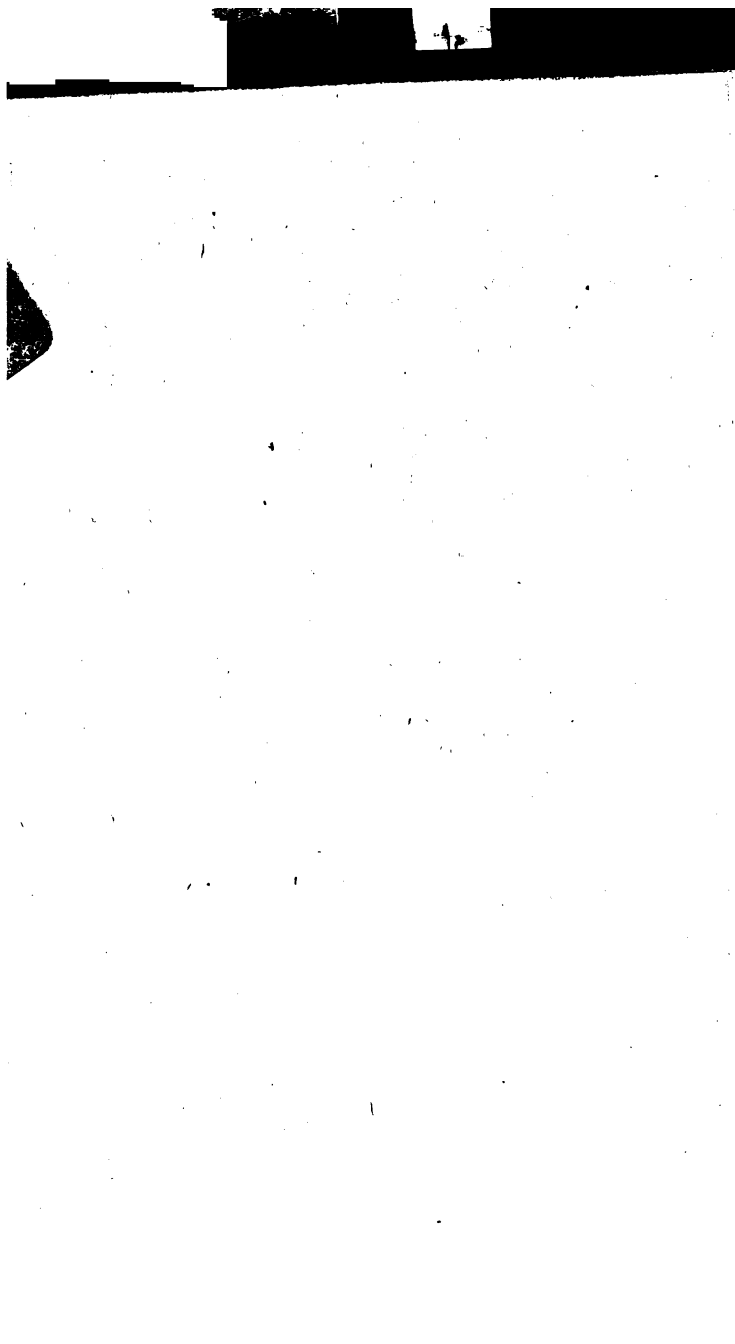
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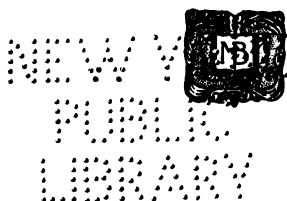
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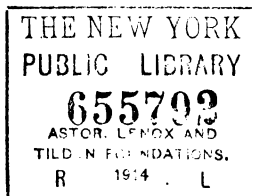
THE HARVEST MOON

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BY
J. S. FLETCHER



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I

THAT Sunday evening, according to well-established custom, Cornelius Van de Linde had the old farmstead all to himself, save that his favourite sheep-dog shared the hearth with him. His only child Linda, then a great girl of eighteen, had gone across the meadows to the church at Fishlake; the two old pensioners who lived under his roof, Matthew and Sarah Jennett, one of whom spent his day in admiring the pigs while the other busied herself in sitting by the kitchen fire, had taken a leisurely progress towards the little chapel in the neighbouring village; the two maid-servants were out with their respective swains. The house was still as the land outside—the land from which the wheat and barley had just been safely garnered. Over land and house the soft September twilight, still golden with the glory of the scarce-disappeared sun, fell like a benediction.

Cornelius always spent his Sunday evenings in

a methodical way. He was one of those elderly men who, by recollection of early training and from the inclination which comes with advancing age to stand by the things first thought, are lovers of system and order, liking to do to-day what they did yesterday and will do to-morrow. When the house was quiet, Linda having departed to church and the old folks to chapel, it was his custom to take the old family Bible from the great oak desk in which it was religiously enshrined and to read a chapter aloud to himself, the old dog standing by with alert eyes and cocked ears. This sacred duty over, he replaced the Bible in the desk, and from a secret drawer in that ancient receptacle drew forth certain bundles of letters tied up with strips of faded ribbon. These bundles were all superscribed in Cornelius's crabbed handwriting—some, "My Father's Letters"; some, "My Mother's Letters"; some, "My Good Wife's Letters." He used to untie the ribbons with his gnarled fingers, and spread the letters out with reverent care, as if he had been a devotee handling the relics of a saint, and he would read a sentence or two here, or a page or two there, and sometimes a letter right through, and now and then he would come across a dried geranium leaf or

the petal of a rose, and these he would lightly touch with the tip of his little finger as if he feared they might crumble. Then he would make the letters into bundles again, and retie the faded ribbon, and put the bundles back into the secret drawer and relock the desk, and that done would fill and light his pipe, and, with the sheep-dog at his heels, would go out into the flower-garden in front of the house to look around him at his well-filled stack-yard and at the broad acres from which he had once again reaped a good harvest.

Cornelius Van de Linde's farmstead stood in the midst of as level a tract of land as can be found in England outside the Fens. In all directions the country stretched away in an unbroken level for mile upon mile. The towers and spires of churches, the tall poplars which rose here and there, the gables and chimneys of an occasional manor-house—these objects were discernible at long distances, so uniformly level was the land. But though it had once been nothing but bog and morass and fen, with great stretches of mere in which more than one royal sportsman had fished to his heart's content, there was nothing cheerless or monotonous in its aspect. Unlike much reclaimed fen-land

it was well wooded, well supplied with thick hedgerows and prolific orchards and gardens, and it produced corn crops at which no farmer could grumble. But, as its own folk were fond of saying, it was as flat as a pancake.

Cornelius strolled through his garden, still gay with flowers, and opening the gate passed out beneath a rustic arch on to the road which ran east and west of him for miles—a strip of yellow cutting through a carpet of purpling grey. He looked up the road and down the road; there was not a soul in sight. Cornelius, holding his long pipe in one hand, planted the other under the tails of his coat and turned to look at what, after his daughter, he considered the finest sight in the world—his own house; his own buildings; his own stacks of wheat, barley, oats, hay; his own orchard; his own garden. In his opinion there was no such farmstead as his in all that part of the country. And it was all the dearer to him because it had been his father's, and his grandfather's, and his great-grandfather's.

The old house made an attractive picture in the gathering twilight. Originally a manor-house which had been crenellated in feudal days, a great deal of its ancient architecture

remained ; no additions had been made to it since the seventeenth century. It was a house of infinite charm and of many surprises ; there was a square tower, low in stature, but grim of aspect, which suggested wars and ghosts and haunted chambers ; there were mullioned windows with diamond panes which made one think of fair ladies, leaning out upon adoring lovers through frames of ivy and jasmine ; there were nooks and corners and quaint projections and recesses. In some places the stone roof bent inward in such a fashion that any one who saw it for the first time would have prophesied its immediate fall ; Cornelius van de Linde viewed these subsidences with equanimity, for they had been there ever since he could remember anything. The old house would last not only his time, but to the time of his children's children, and longer.

" A bonnie place ! " said Cornelius, as he paced up and down the road. " A bonnie, bonnie place, Shepherd, my lad ! "

The old dog, hearing his master's voice pronounce his name, gave a sharp bark of appreciation and wagged his tail. He began to frisk about Cornelius in quite a youthful manner, but suddenly stopped, faced about, and stood

on the alert, gazing down the road. Cornelius, noting his cocked ears, followed his gaze.

A moving figure was coming along the road from the eastward—a grey speck against the pale yellow of the sky beyond. Cornelius soon perceived it to be the figure of a man who rode a bicycle, and he called the dog to heel—he had a dislike to bicycles and a tendency to rush at them.

“Down, boy, down!” he said. “Steady, now!”

The man on the bicycle came slowly onward, presenting himself at last as a very young-looking man, who carried a knapsack on his shoulders and a small load of luggage disposed about his machine. He saluted Cornelius with a polite word as he slowly passed him on the road, then lifted his head mechanically to look at the house. The slow pace of the well-loaded bicycle grew slower and still slower; at the end of the garden wall its rider dismounted and resting on the handle-bars gazed searchingly at the scene before him.

Cornelius grew interested. He was sure that the stranger was admiring his house, and he felt a sympathetic regard for him at once. He drew nearer, with the old dog at his heels. The

stranger looked at him and pushed his bicycle towards him. He spoke.

“May I ask, sir, if this is your house?”

Cornelius smiled with pride and gratification.

“It is, sir. Mine and my father’s before me—and his father’s before him.”

“It is a very fine old place—a beautiful old place. It is just the place I have been searching for. I wonder if you would let me make a sketch of it?”

“You may make a hundred sketches of it, sir, inside and out, with all the pleasure in the world.”

“That is very kind of you. I am going on to Doncaster now—to-morrow I shall certainly return and avail myself of your kindness. There must certainly be some fine rooms inside. A stone hall, no doubt?”

“If you will step inside and take a friendly glass with me, sir,” said Cornelius, “I will show you what there is inside and you can judge for yourself. I’ll warrant it will please you.”

The traveller hesitated for a moment, glanced at his watch, and then thanked Cornelius for his hospitable invitation.

“I am much obliged to you, sir,” he said, with an air of old-fashioned courtesy which made

almost whimsical contrast with his youthful appearance. "I shall be glad to spend half an hour with you."

"Well said!" cried Cornelius. He led the way through the garden to the stone porch which gave entrance to the house. Pausing before it he pointed with pride to an inscription carved above the lintel: "CORNELIUS VAN DE LINDE BOUGHT MORCARSTOFT, A.D. 1725." The stranger, reading this aloud, raised his eyebrows.

"An ancestor of yours?" he said.

"Great-great-great-grandfather, sir," replied Cornelius. "Every man of us has borne the name since." Having said this he sighed, remembering, as he spoke, that he had no son.

"You are of Dutch descent, Mr. Van de Linde?"

"We are, sir. We came over with Vermuyden in the reign of Charles the First—came to drain the Fens. That done we came still further north to drain Thorne Waste, in the middle of which we now stand. My ancestor stayed hereabouts and began to farm—he did well, and his grandson—this Cornelius—bought the homestead. We are not tenants—we are proprietors. But come in, sir—come in."

The young stranger set his bicycle against

the wall of the porch and followed Cornelius into the house.

"You are very kind, Mr. Van de Linde," he said. "Allow me to introduce myself—my name is Darrell, Adrian Darrell."

"Very glad to welcome you, Mr. Darrell. A Londoner, no doubt?"

"I live in London at times Mr. Van de Linde."

"And an artist? My daughter will be interested in seeing your work. She draws a bit herself. But you are, no doubt, a professional artist—perhaps a noted painter?"

Darrell laughed.

"I'm afraid I'm too young for that, sir, but—I hope to be."

"That's right—nothing like hope. And as for youth, sir, you'll mend of that. Now then, perhaps we can see."

While the conversation had been going on, Cornelius had set a large silver lamp on a centre table and occupied himself in lighting it. He turned up the light; Darrell uttered an exclamation of pleasure.

"Ah!" he said. "As I thought—a stone hall!"

Cornelius, hands plunged in pockets, smiled with pleasure and gratification as he watched

his guest look about him. Darrell smiled too—smiled with the delight of the artist who has chanced on something that appeals and pleases.

“It’s delightful,” he murmured, “delightful.”

The light revealed a square hall of some size. To half their height the four walls were panelled in black oak; the space above that was bare stone. The roof was spanned by heavy oaken beams and rafters; the floor was of square red tiles, uncovered except before the wide fireplace, where a thick carpet was spread between a great chair and a wide, cushioned long settle; deeply recessed window-places were hollowed out of the wall on either side the porch entrance; on the side opposite the hearth a staircase of oak rose to a small gallery from which three doors opened. All the furniture of the hall was of oak; there were no pictures, but on a broad ledge which ran round the panelling was set out a collection of old china plates, bowls, dishes, arranged with taste and discernment. In the light of the silver lamp and the crackling fire the place was a picture in itself.

Darrell sighed with pleasure and turned to his host with a smile of gratification. For a moment the two men stood looking at each other—the elder a sturdy, broadly built man

with cherry coloured cheeks, clear blue eyes, and crisp silvery hair, strong and hearty in spite of his years ; the younger a tall, slender young man, little more than a lad, singularly handsome of feature, with dark hair and eyes and a sensitive mouth, graceful of figure and movement, and wearing unconsciously a certain dignity of manner which seemed incongruous in one so young and was yet undoubtedly becoming since it was so evidently natural. At the end of that mutual inspection each man was conscious of admiration for the other—the young man admired the elder for his sturdy strength, his ripe old age ; the old man admired the younger for his handsome face, his fine eyes, his winning air. He suddenly clapped his hand on Darrell's shoulder.

"You're a handsome lad !" he said with hearty frankness. "Sit down and have something to drink. What shall it be—wine, spirits, or ale ? Say the word, Mr. Darrell."

"Ale, then, if you please, Mr. Van de Linde. I never drink spirits, and I'm a poor judge of wine."

"And I can give you as good a glass of ale as you'll find in England," said Cornelius. "Home-brewed, sir, home-brewed—a rare thing

in these days. If you smoke, try one of those cigars in the box on the chimney-ledge there. Now for the ale."

He left the hall by a door which opened behind the long settle and Darrell heard his solid tread sounding along a stone-paved passage. Presently the solid tread returned and Cornelius entered with a jug topped by a fine crown of foam. This he set down with a glass at his guest's elbow.

"There, sir," he said, "give me your opinion of that. I won't join you in it, for at my time of life ale begins to get a little too cold for the stomach, but I'll pledge you in a drop of Schnapps—the real stuff, Mr. Darrell, that I've no doubt my forefathers drank before they left the country over-seas. Your very good health, sir, and success to you."

"It is most interesting," said Darrell, when he had suitably replied to these hospitable wishes, "to find the descendants of Dutch settlers in this part of the country. I had no idea of such a thing."

"Oh!" replied Cornelius, re-lighting his pipe. "There are a great many of us. If you look into our village churchyards, Mr. Darrell, hereabouts you will find plenty of names which you will recognise as Dutch. Plenty of 'vans,' I

assure you—Vanderpants, Vandravarts, Van Gelders, Van der Huysens. My wife was a Vandravart. Of course we are all good English now, but I sometimes think the old Dutch strain comes out. Our women, now, are scrupulous about the cleanliness of their houses, and we have a great love of tulips. But I think that's about all—I doubt if any of us know a word of any language but English."

"And you are all descendants of men who came with Vermuyden to drain the Fen lands?" said Darrell.

"That is so, sir. Cornelius Vermuyden, after draining the Lincolnshire fens, came into these parts to drain the great fen that stretched from the Don to nigh upon Doncaster. Charles the First gave him so much out of the land he reclaimed. Naturally he brought many of his own folk across the water to share in the work and in the reward. Many of them no doubt went back, but many of them stayed, as my ancestor did. I am glad he did, sir, I am glad he did!"

"You are fond of your farm, Mr. Van de Linde."

Cornelius smacked the oak table.

"The best farm hereabouts, Mr. Darrell, the

very best ! You shall see it. And yet"—here Cornelius sighed—"I shall be the last of my name to hold it."

Darrell looked a polite inquiry.

"I have no son, sir," said Cornelius. "I have but one child, a daughter—the apple of my eye. Perhaps she will marry and call her eldest son after me. But he will not be a Van de Linde, even then."

Before Darrell could think of anything to say in reply to this, steps and voices were heard in the porch. The door opened.

A girl stepped into the hall—into the full light of the lamp. She paused, glancing from Cornelius to the stranger.

Adrian Darrell and Linda Van de Linde looked into each other's eyes.

II

"THIS," said Cornelius Van de Linde, "is my daughter, Linda. Linda, this young gentleman is Mr. Adrian Darrell. He is an artist, on his way to Doncaster, and he is going to make a picture of the house. He is also going to stay to supper."

The girl came forward and gave Darrell her hand, responding to his respectful pressure with a grip as strong and firm as a man's. She looked him squarely and frankly in the face; he, on his part, stared back at her as he might have stared at some wonderful picture, uncurtained to him for the first time. He had thought the old house beautiful; he thought the daughter of the house a vision of delight. And as she gazed at him with a frank candour with which speculation and curiosity were mingled he gazed at her with a smiling admiration which he took no pains to conceal. For a brief space these two young people, hand in hand, looked at each

other with that curious, fluttering sympathy of youth which springs up most readily in such unexpected meetings as these.

Linda Van de Linde was at that time a gloriously handsome and healthy young woman of eighteen. She was one of those maidens upon whom Nature lavishes her gifts freely. Tall, finely proportioned, much more of a Juno than a Venus, she gave infinite promise of love, wifehood, motherhood. Her whole personality breathed a subtle femininity ; her erect bearing, her generous bosom, her finely rounded limbs, suggested strength, power, vast possibility. To see her was to be made to think of some tract of rich virgin soil open to the sun and the rain, the snows and the winds, concealing within itself the power to yield the richest harvest. Adrian Darrell felt his heart leap as her hand grasped his ; every pulse in him quivered as he looked into the unfathomable depths of her great soft eyes, black almost as the masses of glossy black hair which crowned her wide, placid brow. She was a dark beauty, he said to himself—yes, dark as night—but what a complexion—and what a warm, red mouth !

He would have fallen at her feet and worshipped her (as he would have worshipped anything

beautiful, picture or statue) there and then. She was a young goddess.

As for her, she, in that moment (which, of course, was not a moment, but perhaps the hundred-thousandth part of a second) felt, for the first time in her life, a vague sense as of something new. The rich colour in her cheeks deepened a little.

"How you surprised me, father! To come home and find you with company! Sit down, please, Mr. Darrell—we will soon have supper. Father, there is Dr. Garrendon outside—he is doing something at his bicycle. He is coming in for a minute or two just to see you. Excuse me, Mr. Darrell." Her voice was like the rest of her—full, rich. Darrell felt sure that she sang, and sang well. He watched her as she crossed the hall and climbed the old stairway to the gallery above—she moved with the freedom and grace which had come to her from an active childhood and girlhood in the fields and woods.

At the top of the stairs she paused, and looking down into the hall, said: "Father, make Dr. Garrendon stay to supper—he has walked all the way from Fishlake with me, wheeling his bicycle. He must stay!"

As she disappeared into one of the rooms opening from the gallery a man entered from the porch. Darrell looked at him with some curiosity, not unmixed with a certain feeling of jealousy that he should have been this fine young beauty's escort through the September twilight across a land still fragrant with the scent of harvest. He had half expected to see some strapping, handsome young medico; instead, he found himself looking at a man of apparently thirty years, of medium height, clean-shaven, spectacled, who, at sight of a stranger, showed certain signs of shyness and seemed to hesitate about his further entrance.

"Come in, come in, doctor!" exclaimed Cornelius. "Glad to see you, sir, glad to see you! This young gentleman, doctor, is Mr. Darrell, an artist from London, who's fallen in love with the old place and wants to make pictures of it—Mr. Darrell, sir, this is Dr. Garrendon, nearly as much a stranger to these parts as you are, seeing that he's only been with us two years. Now, doctor, what will you take to drink?"

"No one is a stranger very long in your neighbourhood, Mr. Van de Linde," said Garrendon, smiling, as he turned from shaking hands with

Darrell. "I daresay Mr. Darrell has found that out already. Have you been long in these parts?" he continued, looking at the young man with obvious interest through his spectacles, which Darrell quickly perceived to hide a pair of very kindly eyes. "There is much to see hereabouts."

"No," said Darrell. "I am[^] here quite by accident. I was cycling past the house on my way to Doncaster when Mr. Van de Linde very kindly asked me to step in and see the interior."

"A beautiful old house it is," said the doctor, taking a tumbler of whisky and soda which Cornelius handed him. "Thank you, Mr. Van de Linde—I am sure that will be very good after my walk; it is a long way round by the road. And you are going to paint a picture of it?" he went on again, turning to Darrell.

"With Mr. Van de Linde's permission I should like to make some water-colour sketches. I have been searching for such a house as this for weeks without success," answered Darrell.

"I have told him," said Cornelius, "that he is welcome to make as many pictures as he likes, inside and outside. If," he added, with a sly

each other's faces—in silence. She broke that silence with an abrupt question.

“Are you a famous artist?”

Darrell smiled.

“Not at all!”

“Are you going to be famous? Do you want to be famous?”

He smiled again.

“I want to be famous—I do not know whether I shall be famous.”

She knitted her brows a little, examining him with a curiously penetrative scrutiny.

“Oh, yes, you will!” she said, suddenly.

“I shall?”

“Yes.”

“Have you the gift of second sight?” he asked her, laughing.

She lifted her hands and smoothed the heavy locks of dark hair from her temples; then shook her head.

“I don't know. But you will be a famous man. It is in your face. Please come to supper. Father will know where to find us.”

She led him into a parlour which opened off the stone hall, and pointed a seat to him at a supper-table spread with good things. Cornelius came in jovial and bustling—for the next half

hour Darrell found himself pressed to eat and drink. Having ridden some distance that evening he was hungry ; he could not fail to notice that Cornelius, himself a mighty trencherman, was glad to find that his guest possessed a hearty appetite.

After supper they went back to the stone hall. The old man settled himself in his easy chair ; Linda sat on a stool at his feet, her head resting against his knee ; Darrell dropped into the corner of the long-settle nearest to the glowing fire. Some chance word at supper had revealed the fact that he had travelled—the girl began to question him about the lands and cities he had seen. Darrell could talk, and talk well—he began to tell them of Rome, of Venice, of Antwerp, of Bruges ; of sunsets in this land, of sunrises in that. It was good to sit there in that old stone hall, by the cheery fire, and to watch the girl's mobile face, her glorious eyes, her red mouth. . . .

He rose at last, looking at his watch.

"How I must have tired you out !" he exclaimed. "I must go—it is late."

Linda looked up at her father.

"Father," she said, "why should Mr. Darrell go at all ? Why shouldn't he stay ?"

Cornelius slapped his knee.

"That's my lass!" he exclaimed. "The very thing! What need to go? Fetch your bicycle inside, sir, and make yourself at home. You're heartily welcome."

III

DARRELL found himself an hour later in a chamber which smelt of lavender and dried rose-leaves. He looked round about him at the quaint things with which the room was furnished—the great four-poster bed, with its dimity hangings; the old clothes-press, big enough to hide half a dozen people in; the samplers framed in queer old frames on the walls; the two or three old pictures, dark with age, which flanked them; the china shepherds and shepherdesses on the mantelpiece. It was all so old-world; so charming; so fragrant and clean.

He opened the diamond-paned window and looked out. The land was silent as a windless sea. Up to his nostrils stole the sweet insidious scent of barley mingling with the smell of the brown soil. The heavens were one vast dome of darkest blue; above him the stars glittered like points of fire. And away to the eastward

he saw the first pale crescent of a new moon, cut clear against the sky.

He closed the window and again looked round him. He smiled at the thought of Linda. He was under the same roof with this splendid young creature ; he would see her on the morrow, and the next day, and the next. He smiled again . . . thinking of the Gifts of the Gods. And he told himself that when the Gods give Gifts one should take them lest the Gods be displeased.

IV

DARRELL woke in the morning as suddenly as he had gone to sleep over-night. He gazed about him, realised his unfamiliar surroundings, saw that the sunlight was flooding the room, and rose. It was half-past seven ; Linda had told him that they breakfasted at eight o'clock ; he had time, then, to dress in leisure.

He drew the blind and threw his windows wide open. In the garden beneath he saw Cornelius and his daughter, talking to a labourer who was evidently receiving instructions as to some gardening operation. The old gentleman, who on the previous evening had been arrayed in broadcloth, was now arrayed in a riding suit of drab whipcord, but in a somewhat rakish fashion ; he wore a cream-coloured top hat and sported a flower in his button-hole. Linda was in a white linen gown ; strolling about the paths of the garden on her father's arm she looked the perfection of glowing health. Once she

lifted her face in the direction of Darrell's window—her eyes and mouth were more appealing than ever.

He dressed quickly and went down to the parlour, where he found breakfast spread on the same generous lines as the previous night's supper. Once more there was the same hearty welcome; the same honest pleasure at his presence; the same unaffected simplicity. Utter strangers to each other but a few hours previously these three would have been taken by any one who had seen them at breakfast that morning to be old acquaintances, so thoroughly did Cornelius and his daughter do their best to make Darrell feel at home.

After breakfast Cornelius lighted a cigar, bade his guest help himself to the contents of the box whenever he felt inclined, and taking down a hunting-crop from a rack above the mantelshelf, announced his departure on his usual morning ride round the land.

"I suppose you'll occupy your time with your brush, sir," he said to Darrell. "Draw the old place fine, sir, draw it fine! And when there's anything you want, my boy, a glass of ale or a crust of bread and cheese, to put you on till dinner-time, don't be afraid to ask for it."

"I'll see that Mr. Darrell doesn't starve, father," said Linda.

"I think there is little fear of that while I am under your roof, Mr. Van de Linde," said Darrell, laughing.

When Cornelius had ridden away, Darrell unpacked a valise in the stone hall and took from it a sketch-book and his sketching materials. He unstrapped a portable easel from his bicycle and made everything in readiness for a morning's work. Thus occupied, Linda came to him.

"What are you going to paint first, Mr. Darrell?" she asked.

"First, Miss Van de Linde, I am going to look round the house, examining it from every standpoint. In the end I suppose I shall make a sketch of it from the corner of the garden."

"Yes," she said, "it looks pretty from the old summer-house, especially when the sun shines on it as it does this morning."

He opened his sketch-book and laid it on the table before her.

"That is the last water-colour sketch I made," he said. "I finished it yesterday."

Watching her face he saw the colour deepen in her cheeks and a new light come into her eyes. She uttered a little cry of pleasure.

twinkle of his eye, "if he will leave one behind him we will frame it and hang it on the parlour wall, eh, doctor?"

"You are a true Yorkshireman," said the doctor, smiling. "I shall be interested in seeing your work, Mr. Darrell. You will stay in the neighbourhood, of course, for a while?"

"Yes, I shall stay in Doncaster," replied Darrell. "It is within a short distance, I believe."

"Oh, only a few miles," answered Garrendon. "You'll cycle it in forty minutes easily. Well, Mr. Van de Linde, now that I have said 'How do you do' I must further say 'Good-night,' and be off—I have work to do."

"What, not stop and take a bit of supper!" exclaimed Cornelius. "Nay, man, don't be in such a hurry—I was looking forward to a pleasant hour with you two gentlemen."

Garrendon smiled ruefully, glancing at Darrell.

"I wish I could!" he said. "But I can't—I've three old women to visit to-night. Pity the woes of a country practitioner! No—I must go. Good-night, Mr. Darrell; we shall meet again. Good-night, Mr. Van de Linde."

"Well, if you must, you must," said Cornelius

disappointedly, as his guest moved off towards the porch. "But——"

A door in the gallery opened and Linda appeared. She caught sight of the doctor's retreating figure and ran down the stairs.

"You're not going, Dr. Garrendon?" she exclaimed. "You must stay to supper—you must!"

Garrendon smiled at her and shook his head.

"Ah, but I mustn't!" he said. "Old Sally Brewster and old Mary Smith and old Jane Scholey would never sleep to-night if I didn't give them their physic and coddle them up, and it's time they were asleep now. No—many thanks, Miss Van de Linde. Good-night."

"Well, if you must, you must," she said, echoing her father's words. "But——"

"I, too, should be on the road," said Darrell. "If Dr. Garrendon is going my way——"

"Nay, come, come!" exclaimed Cornelius. "I'm not going to be done out of both of you. Sit you down, Mr. Darrell—the doctor's riding in the opposite direction."

Darrell required no pressing to remain. He wanted to look at Linda Van de Linde. Once more, while Cornelius walked down to the garden gate with the doctor, he and she studied

to perform whatever task it consisted of in as leisurely a fashion as possible, marvelled at the way in which the young gentleman in the knickerbocker suit and queer-shaped hat stuck to his task. For himself he smoked a clay pipe as he worked, and took every other five minutes off to straighten his back and look about him, and he was astonished that the picture-drawing young man did not even smoke a cigarette and never looked up, except to study the old house or to measure something with his pencil. Idle folk came along the road outside and stopped to peer over the privet hedge at the unusual spectacle of a man making pictures. Darrell appeared to be unconscious of their presence, though he must have seen them out of the tail of his eye.

"An onsociable sort o' gentleman," decided the labourer. "Mornin', Thomas," he remarked loudly to a member of his own order, who came up to the hedge, leading a horse, and stopped to gaze, open-mouthed, at the picture-drawing process. "Fine mornin'."

The man, after a solemn pause, contrived to close his mouth and, in due course, to open it again.

"Aye, t' mornin's reight enough," he assented.

"I've nowt to say agen it. Hev yer gotten all yeer harvest in. James?"

James made a lengthy show and convenient business of scraping the clinging earth off his spade.

"We gat it all in—raäkin's an' all—a fotnit sin' come next Tewsda," he answered, with a tone of superiority. "Hev ya gotten all yeers in?"

"Why, no—we hev one o' them Low Fields out yit," replied Thomas, in the tones with which the vanquished addresses the victor.

James sniffed.

"We allus are t' fost," he said. "Our maister wodn't lig comfortable i' his chaymer at neets if we worrn't fost. He aims at that theer."

"Aw, he's a good farmer, is Maister Vandy-lindy!" agreed Thomas. "I've allus allowed at he wor. Weel, I mun away—I'm takkin owd Captain here to be shod, but I'm shewer it's heigh time he wor takken to t'kennils. Weel, mornin', James."

"Mornin', Thomas."

When the sound of the old horse's hoofs had died out along the hard road, Darrell, without looking up from his work, said:

"What did Thomas mean when he said it was high time that Captain was taken to the kennels?"

James's countenance brightened. Nothing pleases a countryman so much as being asked to instruct the ignorant townsman. Besides, Darrell's question gave him another opportunity of straightening his back and scraping his spade.

"Why, you see, sir," he said. "It's t' custom i' these parts when an owd hoss gets past work to send him to t' nearest kennels. That's t' rule, as you might term it."

"But what do they do with them there?" asked Darrell, working steadily at his picture.

"Why, they give 'em to t' hounds to ate," replied James.

"What—alive?"

"Why, no, not alive, o' course. I neer seen t'operation, as you might term it, mister, but I unnerstan' 'at they boil 'em up and mix 'em wi' meal and sich-like, and mak' t' lot into a dinner for t'hounds. That's what happens to t' owd hosses i' this country, onnyway," concluded James, conscious that he had added much to the stranger's knowledge. "It's t' custom as they call it."

While Darrell was reflecting upon this information he heard a light footstep on the gravelled path, and looked up to see Linda, who was bearing down upon him with an old silver tray, whereon she had set out a jug of foaming ale, a loaf of dusky-crust bread, and the half of a Stilton cheese. She smiled as she set the tray down on the little table in the old summer-house.

"It is eleven o'clock," she said, "and I have brought you your drinking."

Darrell stared at her.

"My—what?" he said.

"Your drinking," she replied. "Don't you know what that means?"

"I haven't the remotest notion of its meaning as a word," he said.

She smiled and dropped her voice and glanced at James, who was now digging with unusual vigour.

"You'll see that James knows," she murmured. Then she raised her voice and said loudly, "James!"

James straightened himself. Expectancy was written all over his face.

"Yes, Miss Linda?"

"Go round to the kitchen and tell them to

give you your drinking. I'm sure you can do with it."

Linda laughed when James had uttered his evidently heartfelt thanks and set off post-haste across the garden.

"He knew, you see," she said. "No need to give James a definition. Now, do you know what he'll do? He'll get a pint of ale, and cut himself an enormous slice of bread, and an equally enormous piece of cheese, and he'll eat and drink by the kitchen fire as long as ever he can, and then waste a few more minutes gossiping with old Sarah, and then he'll come very slowly back and dig again—and all of a sudden he will look at his watch, and lo! it will be twelve o'clock and he will go home to dinner. But won't you have your drinking?"

"Since you have been so kind as to bring it to me with your own hands," said Darrell, leaving his easel, "I will. But on one condition."

"A condition? What condition?"

"That you stay and talk to me."

She shook her head—then suddenly sat down in the summer-house and poured the ale out into his glass.

"Well, five minutes, then," she said. "But

what would you say if no dinner appeared at one o'clock?"

"Why, do you cook the dinner?"

"Truthfully," she said, "I don't. The girls do that, but under my strict superintendence. But there are lots of things which I do in connection with it—I am housekeeper, you see."

Adrian was watching her admiringly from the opposite side of the table. She was leaning back against the decaying wood-work; her head inclined a little to one side; her shapely hands folded idly in her lap. A sudden notion seized upon him.

"Do you know what I should like?" he said. She opened her great eyes full upon him.

"No!" she answered. "What?"

"I should like to see you in a Dutch dress—the real national dress, with the proper ornaments. It would suit you so well."

Linda clapped her hands and broke into a ripple of laughter. It set his nerves tingling to hear her laugh—it was full, rich, pure as her eyes and ripe lips.

"Why, how funny!" she said. "I have such a dress and all the proper ornaments, and the cap and the shoes! How strange that you should think of that!"

V

WHEN they were comfortably gathered around a glowing fire in the stone hall that evening, the labours of the day over, a Yorkshire high tea solemnly celebrated, Cornelius's pipe in full blast, and peace lying heavy on house and land, the host and hostess demanded to see their guest's sketch-books. Darrell rose to get them; Linda sprang up before him and ran up the stairs.

"I will fetch them," she said. "No one but myself knows where they are. You left them lying in the window-seat this morning, so I took them away and locked them up. And though I wanted to, I didn't peep into them once."

She came running downstairs again within the minute, placed the canvas-bound sketch-books on the centre table, set the lamp where its light fell to the most advantage upon them, took down her father's spectacles from the mantelshelf, fixed them upon his nose, and

pushed him into an elbow-chair immediately in front of the books. She knelt down at his side, with one hand laid on his shoulder, and signed to Darrell to take up a position on the other side of the old man.

"Now begin," she said, half-imperiously. "The audience is ready."

"I hope the audience won't be disappointed," said Darrell, laughing, as he picked up one of the sketch-books and unclasped the covers. "You must remember that these are merely rough water-colour sketches—studies, in fact, though some are rather elaborately finished, of certain scenes in the north of England. You see, I wanted to study the scenery in Northumberland and Durham, and in Yorkshire, so I went straight to Berwick by train, and then came slowly southward by bicycle, turning aside wherever fancy took me, or wherever I heard of a good subject. And eventually I got—here."

"And how long have you been at that job sir?" inquired Cornelius. "It's a long journey all that, to my thinking."

"It is nearly ten weeks since I left London," replied Darrell. "Well, here is the first of the series—Berwick-on-Tweed, looking across the

Border Bridge towards the harbour. Quaint old town, isn't it—and aren't the sunlight effects fine on the roofs and gables ? ”

Linda uttered a low, cooing “ Ooh ! ” of admiration ; her father, after a first glance, took his long pipe out of his mouth, pushed it across the table, and propping his chin in his hands made long and critical inspection.

“ Well, I consider that's a very fine piece of work, sir ! ” he said heartily at last. “ The way you've made the sun shine on those walls, and the naturalness of those sea-birds, is wonderful. Isn't it, my pretty ? ”

“ It's beautiful,” said Linda, in a low voice.

“ And this,” continued Darrell, turning the page, “ is Norham Castle from the north bank of the Tweed—an early afternoon effect.”

“ Beautiful, sir, beautiful ! ” said Cornelius. “ That must be a grand grazing country, and I should say from its appearance there are both trout and salmon in that fine river.”

Linda pulled her father's ear.

“ Father ! ” she said. “ How can you talk about cows and fish when you're looking at such lovely pictures ? ”

“ Why, why, my pretty ! ” said Cornelius. “ It was the naturalness of the river and the

meadows that made me think of the fish and the cows. Ah, and what's this fine bit, Mr. Darrell ? ”

For a good hour Darrell went through his harvest with them, interspersing his accounts with anecdotes of the various scenes and places which he had visited. Many of the sketches were finished ; some nearly so ; others were outlines. It was an interesting and varied collection—there were studies of the hill country round about the Cheviots and in the wilder districts of mountainous character between Westmoreland and Yorkshire ; studies of river scenery on the Tees, the Swale, the Wharfe ; studies of castles like Bamborough, Richmond, Knaresborough, Warkworth ; studies of coast scenery around Whitby and Robin Hood's Bay ; studies in the grey cathedral cities ; studies of Rievaulx and Fountains and Byland ; studies of “ bits ” seen here and there in the little market towns. To the father and daughter, who had travelled little, the sight of these pictures gave a delight which widely travelled folk would not have experienced. They sighed with pleasure and with a regret that was evident when the last page was turned.

“ You're a very clever young gentleman,

sir!" said Cornelius. "Allow me to shake your hand, sir—you'll go a long way in your profession."

"Thank you," said Darrell. "I'll try. Now which of these sketches do you like the best, Mr. Van de Linde?"

"Well sir," replied Cornelius, slowly ruminating, "if my opinion goes for anything I should say that last one you showed us—Howden church. I consider that you've done that grand old monument more justice than I've ever known it done. That's a beautiful piece."

"And you, Miss Van de Linde?"

"I?—I like the one of Bamborough Castle best," she said. "It's so grand, and gloomy, and strong."

Darrell whipped out a penknife and before they realised what he was doing, had cut the two pictures neatly out of the books. He placed one in Cornelius's hands; the other in Linda's.

"Then honour me by accepting them," he said. "If you will let me I will get them properly framed for you in Doncaster, and then I should suggest that you hang them just there—on this panel."

Linda's face flushed with pleasure.

"Oh, that's too good of you!" she said impulsively. "It's too good, isn't it, father?"

"I'm sure I'm very much obliged to you, sir," said Cornelius, whose honest face shone with pleasure. "I don't know that any one ever gave me a real first-class picture before, though we've had plenty from the grocers and drapers on almanacks at Christmas-time. There, my pretty—put those safely away till Mr. Darrell can see to their framing. And now, sir, let's turn to the hearth and have a bit more tobacco and another glass."

Linda, looking highly delighted, went away with the pictures. She was a long time in returning, and Darrell, sitting in the corner of the oak settle and listening to Cornelius's discourse on farming, began to wonder when she was coming back. Half an hour had gone by, and he was becoming impatient of her absence when a half-mocking, half-merry laugh sounded from the gallery above. The old man and the young man looked up. There, holding a candle above her in such a fashion that the light fell full upon her face and bosom stood Linda, smiling down upon them. She was in

the Dutch dress of which she had spoken that morning.

"May a poor Dutch maiden appear before such great gentlemen?" she asked.

Cornelius slapped his knee.

"Well, now, if the girl hasn't been and put on that old dress that was my great-grandmother's!" he exclaimed. "What cantrips will she be up to next? Come down, my pretty, come your ways down!"

"Yes, do come down!" entreated Darrell. "Do! I want to see the dress—it's so quaint."

She hesitated.

"I am shy," she said. "I am not Dutch."

"Then be Dutch for five minutes. Come!"

Still carrying the candle she came down the stairs, and advancing into the full light made Darrell a modest curtsy.

"Every woman of our family that ever I knew has been fond of dressing up in that old gown and those fal-lals," murmured Cornelius reflectively. "Seemed to please them, Mr. Darrell, somehow, just as it pleases little girls to dress their dollies. But I never remember any of them that looked as well in it as my lass there looks."

Darrell scarcely heard what Cornelius said.

The artist-feeling in him was stirred to a keen hunger.

"Ah!" he said suddenly, with a deep sigh
"How I should like to paint you, like that!"

"And an uncommonly pretty picture it would make, sir," exclaimed Cornelius.

Linda smiled and looked down at her gown, her ornaments. There was an old-fashioned mirror close by—she turned to it and studied the effect which she and the Dutch gown and its accessories made.

"Should I look as nice as in my very best bib and tucker and my newest picture-hat?" she inquired, archly.

"You would look beautiful in anything," said Darrell, with candid fervour, "simply because you are beautiful. But there's something in that gown—in the combination of you and the gown—that appeals strongly to me. I suppose it's because of your Dutch extraction."

"That's it, sir," said Cornelius. "I always noticed that whenever any of our women donned those things the Dutch in them came out very strong. It's the lace and the old silver that does it."

"If I painted you in that dress," continued

Darrell, "I would pose you leaning against an old delf-rack—I daresay you have one?"

"Yes—in the kitchen—full of old blue delf-ware," said Linda.

"With a great bunch of tulips in your hands, and in the background, seen through an open window, a garden gay with tulips," he said. "I'd like you to see what a picture I could make of *that*!"

Cornelius suddenly smote his knee.

"Make it, sir, make it! I would like to see that picture—you explain it so clear that I can see it now. I say—make it!"

"But, Mr. Van de Linde, it would take some time—weeks—to——"

Cornelius wagged his head.

"Nothing is done without time," he said, sententiously. "Are you your own master, sir?"

"Indeed, I am."

Cornelius smote his knee again.

"Then be my guest as long as you please—but make that picture!"

Later that night when Linda was divesting herself of the Dutch gown, the exquisite old lace, and the quaint ornaments of silver, she found herself smiling at the reflection of her own face—and wondered why.

VI

ONE afternoon, some days later, Darrell, working at his easel in the garden, became quite suddenly impressed by a sense of intense solitude. Everything about him was very quiet—its quietness seemed to descend upon him like a pall that is spread over a dead man. Sometimes, at rare intervals, he heard the voice of a ploughman calling to his horses as he and they traversed far distant fields ; sometimes, in some adjacent farmstead, a dog barked. But all around Morcarstoft the autumnal silence was profound. The old house might have been deserted for ages—there was no sign of life about it, save in the spirals of smoke which curled to the placid blue of the heavens. He knew that within its walls, save for old Sarah, who was without doubt fast asleep in her easy chair by the kitchen fire, there was not a living soul. Cornelius had gone to Selby market ; Linda had gone to see one of the labourers' wives, who was ill. Darrell

had wanted to go with her ; she had bade him go on with his work, pointing out how useless it would be to kick his heels outside the cottage door during the time which she must necessarily spend within. The garden was as empty as the house—James had finished his digging and had set his hands to the stilts of his plough again.

The sudden sense of solitude began to get on Darrell's nerves. He laid his brush down, left his easel, and walked about restlessly. He went outside the garden gate, and standing, hands in pockets, on the road, looked east and west, and saw—nothing. Nothing but the straight, formal hedgerows running in mathematically correct lines until they seemed to meet in the distance, where the yellow strip of road between them vanished. Here and there clumps of trees broke the monotony of the dead level. To the north a long row of sentinel-like poplars showed clear against the sky. As there was not even a slight sighing of the wind, trees and hedgerows were alike motionless—as ghosts suddenly subjected to petrification. Over all this silence there was a domination of scent. The scent of the barley had not yet died out of the shorn fields ; in the stackgarth it was strong and pungent. Mingling with it, now

that ploughing had begun, came the good smell of the earth, fresh, strong, powerful, asserting itself with insistent force as the shining plough-shares turned its new-born face to the sky and the sun. Mingling with both was the rich odour of the apple-orchard, wherein the yet ungathered apples made spots of glaring crimson and yellow against the mysterious gloom of the interlacing boughs. Darrell left the road, and still heavily burdened with a sense of solitude which amounted almost to dismal despair, wandered aimlessly towards the old house. He walked into the stone hall, and standing with bent head before the glowing fire, gazed into it with lack-lustre eyes. He was wanting something, and he did not know what ; he did not even know why he wanted it. All he knew was that something in him was crying for something that was not there, not to be seized upon at the moment. He began to pace up and down, restlessly. He wandered all round the room, staring at the various objects which it contained without comprehending them. In this peregrination he came upon a door behind the long settle, and, with absolute unconsciousness of what he was doing, he turned the handle and walked into the room upon which it opened. And as he

stepped across the threshold he uttered a sudden ejaculation of delight, and as suddenly recognised what it was that he had been wanting.

Beyond the stone hall, the dining-room, the kitchen, and his own bed-chamber, Darrell had as yet seen little of the old house to which fate had led him. He now found himself standing in what is usually called in well-to-do Yorkshire farmsteads the best parlour. It was a quaint old room with a subtle fragrance of dried rose-leaves, geranium, and lavender hanging thickly about it, and he fancied it as being more usually tenanted by the ghosts of the dead than by the bodies of the living. The furniture, old and black with age, was upholstered in ancient tapestry; the walls were chiefly decorated with old samplers. But Darrell scarcely saw anything of these things. Between him and the deep window-seat stood a grand piano!

He could scarcely believe his eyes. Next to his own special art music was the joy of his soul and the piano his favourite instrument. He trembled with eagerness as he approached the piano. Then he experienced a deadly fear lest it should be locked. Joy of joys!—the key was in the lock. He turned it—lifted the lid—actually an Erard!

With a great sigh of content and abandonment he dropped on the stool and let his fingers fall on the keys. The music of the first chords flowed into his soul as water flows into the body of the thirsting man.

Half an hour later Linda, opening the garden gate, suddenly stopped short as if a bullet had passed through her heart. She stood, open-mouthed, for a moment; then, with a swift glance at the deserted easel, she walked quickly up the path, into the house, and stealing to the parlour-door on tip-toe, looked in.

Darrell was by this time utterly unconscious of all the world. His eyes, half-closed, were fixed on some point straight in front of him; his face wore a dreamy, rapturous expression.

Linda stole back to the stone hall and sank into her father's chair. She sat there with throbbing heart, leaping pulses, glowing eyes, for a good hour by the old grandfather's clock in the corner. And Darrell went on playing as if there were only himself and the piano and the music he was drawing from it in the world—or in Eternity.

In Darrell's musical Olympus three gods sat enthroned high above the rest—Wagner, Grieg, Chopin. His manner of paying court to each

was somewhat whimsical—he turned from the knees of one to the feet of another as the moment's caprice prompted him. To the weird and sonorous thunders, the mystic whisperings and shadowy suggestions of Wagner suddenly succeeded the May-day murmur and greenwood-enveloped light-song of Grieg; to this, likely as not, some of the more mournful strains of Chopin, which in their turn were as likely to give place to Grieg as to Wagner. There was thus an infinite variety in any of his impromptu recitals, but it was a variety of rare charm.

The music suddenly ceased—she heard him close and lock the piano. A moment later the parlour-door closed. She sat up in her father's chair, trembling all over, looking towards the big settle.

Darrell came round its corner with a sort of spiritual exaltation in his face. He caught sight of her and started. For a moment they looked keenly at each other. Then she spoke.

“Why did you not tell me that you played?—and like that?” she said.

The question pulled Darrell together. He smiled.

“I—I didn't think of it,” he said. “And I didn't know you had a piano.”

"It was my last birthday present," she said. "It is much too good for me—but father will give me nothing but the best."

"Forgive me for finding it without your permission," he said. "I—somehow, I suddenly became restless and uneasy, and began to wander about, and quite inadvertently I opened that door and saw the piano—and then, well, I'd just got to play. I'm a lot better now."

She sat with her chin in her hands watching him as he filled his pipe and lighted it.

"Which are you really," she suddenly burst out, "a painter or a musician?"

Darrell laughed.

"A painter, I hope," he said. "And that reminds me that I can just do half an hour's work before the light fails. How idle I have been!"

That night, after the usual high tea, as Cornelius and Darrell sat smoking in the stone hall, Linda came in from the kitchen regions, and, with a commanding air, beckoned to both.

"There is a magnificent fire in the parlour," she said. "Come, father: Mr. Darrell is going to play to you. Bring your pipe and glass—but come!"

VII

WITHIN a few days after his promise to paint a picture of Linda in the Dutch dress and silver ornaments Darrell had obtained his necessary materials from London and after careful consideration of its facilities for light decided that the stone hall would suit his purpose. In one corner of it, then, near one of the windows looking into the garden he set up his easel and fixed his canvas—an operation in which Cornelius took the most curious interest, remarking frequently that he had often wondered how these things were done and should now see for himself. Next day the actual work began. But there was first a solemn stipulation on the part of Linda. She would only give him such time as she could conscientiously spare from her household duties. Until eleven o'clock, she declared, she was always fully occupied, and from half-past twelve until one she must superintend the final arrangements for dinner—Darrell

must therefore be content with an hour and a half every morning. To this Darrell said nothing, but Cornelius was inclined to be restive, being keenly impatient to see the work finished. Linda's word, however, was law with him, and he finally bade her have her own way, only charging her to do as Mr. Darrell told her and not to chatter too much to him while he was, as Cornelius phrased it, drawing her picture.

From this time the days went on with a smooth and pleasant flow. These three, brought together so strangely by some ordinance of Fate, were as close friends of long standing within a fortnight of their meeting. They lived together like a happy family. There were the pleasant homely meals together; the cheerful, chatty conversations. Round the fire in the stone hall in the hour before bed-time Cornelius recalled stories of his youth; Darrell told stories of places he had seen abroad. Every night there was music. Father and daughter were never tired of hearing Darrell play, and after a little pressure Darrell had induced Linda to sing, finding, as he had expected to find, that she possessed a fine voice which only needed a proper training. It was a life of infinite peace

and homely comfort ; he told himself that he should miss it when it was over.

It was not necessary that there should be silence between Darrell and Linda during the sittings which she gave him. They talked of many subjects—of books, of music, of other lands and cities (in that case she listening, he talking) ; they laughed, and were light of heart. But she noticed with feminine subtlety, that he never spoke of himself or his family, and her feminine curiosity was first aroused and then piqued.

She was resting one morning for a few minutes, and glancing across at her from his work he caught her looking at him with a curiously wistful expression in her great eyes.

“ Yes ? ” he said, quietly.

“ I was wondering,” she said, “ if you have a father and mother—and brothers and sisters. You never speak of them.”

“ I was always taught,” he answered, “ not to talk of one’s own people. They were very strict with me on that point. No—I have no brothers and no sisters, and my father is dead—long since. My mother is living.”

“ And you love her very much ? ” said Linda, eagerly.

Darrell shifted his easel a little.

"To be truthful," he said, "I don't. I have never had much chance. I haven't seen her for several years—she lives abroad. There—are you rested enough to stand again? We're getting on famously this morning."

Linda moved to her place with a rebellious feeling at her heart.

"He won't tell me anything," she said to herself, and she began to wonder and to speculate all the more. She wanted to know all about him; about his early life; his school-days; his art-training; his life in London; everything. Who were his friends?—what did he do with himself when he wasn't painting?—why didn't he tell her?

"But then, why should he?" she reminded herself. "And yet—I'd tell him everything—everything! Only—I've nothing to tell—except how many pounds of butter went to market last week, and how many eggs were laid."

Two or three mornings later she came into the stone hall with a countenance in which a sort of motherly reproof was mingled with irrepressible feminine inquisitiveness.

"You must be either a very rich or a very, very careless man," she said. "See here!—

look what I found on your dressing-table when I went in to see that your room was tidy."

She opened her hands and displayed several bank-notes and a small heap of gold.

Darrell laughed, took the money from her, and pocketed it.

"It was careless!" he said. "I forgot to put it into my purse this morning."

Linda looked grave.

"Supposing we had had dishonest servants?" she said.

"Yes—you are quite right. I beg your pardon."

"It is yours. But I am angry with you."

Darrell turned and looked earnestly at her.

"Not that!" he said. "Don't—look angry. Come—smile at me."

She looked at him candidly. Gradually the storm went out of her eyes and she smiled with eyes and lips. He took a half-step towards her. She pointed to the easel.

"Go on with your work, Mr. Darrell," she said.

VIII

At the intersection of two highroads, a mile or so away from Morcarstoft stood one of those old-world wayside inns which are fast vanishing from amongst us as hostelries, or are being converted into dwelling-houses, or suffered to fall into gradual, if picturesque decay. Once upon a time these places were centres of busy life—the mail-coaches rattled up to the door three or four times a day ; fresh horses were brought out from the capacious stables ; the guard rummaged in his box for letters and parcels ; the driver got down to stretch his legs and the passengers followed his example ; there was good liquor and plenty of it at the bar presided over by a buxom landlady or a rosy-cheeked maid ; there was always a fine round of beef, a chicken or two, and a ripe cheese on the sideboard in the coffee-room. Here occasionally stopped my lord's travelling carriage—my lord in a coat of many capes and a beaver hat of great height

and curly brim ; my lady in a bonnet which completely buried her, and a shawl that had come from no nearer than the Indies. Here, at all hours, came post-chaises, their occupants wanting horses, or food, or drink, and sometimes accommodation for the night. With the advent of the railways all these features of English life changed. One by one the coaches disappeared ; one by one the post-chaises were relegated to the scrap-heap ; one by one great lords and country squires gave up travelling by road and took (however unwillingly) to travelling behind the steam-engines, the intrusion of which upon their pheasant-coverts and peaceful manor-parks they had so bitterly resented. Then the old wayside inns began to fade—began to fade as rapidly as an old maid whose day is gone by, never to come again. There was something pathetic in their very look. The still open doors, through which few people passed ; the bow-windows, through which few faces looked out ; the echoing halls and corridors, along which few feet trod—all seemed to be asking wistfully why the old order had changed. But the inexorable law knows nothing of pathos, or wistfulness, or regret. The old houses emptied ; the spacious stables emptied ; there were no 'shays in the

big coach-houses, and no bandy-legged men with straws in their mouths hanging about the entrance to the stable yards ; and in the gardens, once gay with flowers and rich in vegetables, the weeds smothered everything. It was only here and there that one of these wayside hostelries could manage to keep open—even then it was no more than a house of call for passers-by ; farmers going to or from market ; cattle-drovers journeying along the road ; pig-jobbers with a cart full of squealing pigs secured by a net ; any stray atom of humanity, from a tourist in a new Norfolk jacket and the latest thing in caps, to a tramp in patched boots and scarcely-held-together rags.

Up to the door of the “ Duke of Orange,” one fine morning that September, came Dr. Garrendon on his bicycle. His spectacled eyes took in once more a scene which he had often wished he had the ability to paint, or at any rate to sketch. There was the fine old house with its queer and almost impossible angles, gables, and chimneys ; there was the tall sign-post with the “ Duke of Orange ” in primary colours, all the more glaring because of recent renovation by a local journeyman painter ; there were the long ranges of stabling, falling surely if slowly to decay ;

there was the deserted garden, a mass of bindweed and nettles. A vague feeling of wonder crossed Garrendon's mind—how was it that ruin, decay, inevitable change invariably produced picturesque effect? He knew that the old house was damp, that its sanitation was bad, that it ought to be razed to the ground in the interests of health, and yet he also knew it to be undeniably picturesque. With its ivy-covered walls, its lichened roof, its quaint old windows, it made a picture which no modern building could have made.

The doctor got off his bicycle and set the machine against the wall of the inn. There were two vehicles near the door—one he recognised as the smartish dog-cart of a certain dissolute young farmer of the neighbourhood whose time was commonly reported to be spent much more in the tavern than on his land; the other as the less pretentious trap of a local butcher, who was well known to like a morning glass. In the farmer's dog-cart sat a small boy who amused himself as he waited his master's pleasure by flicking the sign-post with the whip; the butcher's trap had been secured by the simple expedient of fastening the horse which drew it to one of the many staples driven into the wall.

In both dog-cart and trap the horses were dozing—each knew that he might have to wait there till noon and dinner-hour arrived.

Garrendon stepped into the wide, stone-paved hall, drawing off his gloves as he entered. A draggle-tailed servant-girl, busied with a pail of water, was scrubbing the floor—from the little bar-parlour on the right came a babel of loud voices, the odour of rank tobacco, the smell of spirits, the nauseating smell of stale ale. The farmer, the butcher, and the landlord were enjoying a social hour.

The draggle-tailed girl looked up and recognised the doctor. She spoke, drying her hands on her rough brown apron.

“Oh, if you please, sir, the nurse saw you a-comin’ up the road, and she said would you mind waitin’ a few o’ minutes, ’cause she’s a-tidyin’ the missis’s room up, and washin’ of her?”

“Very well,” said the doctor, resignedly, and with inward reflection that eleven o’clock was a somewhat late hour whereupon to perform these sick-room duties. “I will wait.”

“Perhaps you’ll step into the parlour to the other gentlemen, sir?” said the girl, hospitably.

“No thank you,” replied the doctor. “I will stay here.”

The girl picked up her pail and disappeared through a door at the end of the hall, and Garrendon, leaning against an old oak table looked around him. There were still some remains of the former good estate of the old house—some old oak, a picture or two, an old rack, full of dirty pewter and cracked china, a fox's mask over one door, a stuffed owl over another—but all was lost, cold, dirty, desolate.

The men were talking loudly in the parlour—now two at a time, now, so it seemed, altogether. Suddenly the butcher's voice, thick, raucous, made itself heard above the rest.

"All t' same, I say he's nowt but a silly owd fool, is yon Cornelius Vandy Lindy for lettin' a handsome-lookin' young chap like that theer stop i' t' house wi' yon theer lass o' his! I hear a thing or two, I can tell yer. Theer'll be trouble theer—ye mark my words."

The landlord's voice broke in.

"Where dost t' young man come fro'?"

"Why, he's a Londoner, and we all know what Londoners is. He's one o' them paintin' chaps—I've seen him paintin' i' t' garden more nor once. An' they say he's paintin' t' lass's pictur'—lot o' softness! What's a lass o' that age want her pictur' paintin' for? It's nowt

but fillin' her head wi' grand notions. I'm surprised at Cornelius hesn't more sense."

The voice of the young farmer broke in—evil, sneering.

"Eh, but ye know Mr. Cornelius Vandy Lindy were allus a very high-and-mighty sort o' gentleman. He thinks hisself a good deal above us poor farmers 'at rents t' land, instead o' ownin' it. We'm nowt but a bit o' muck i' my lord's eyes—aye, in i' t' dowter's an' all. I met her one day on t' road-side and raised mi hat to her, polite-like—shoo just gev me a nod as if shoo'd been a princess an' I'd been as nowt. But ye'll see!"

"Why, of course," said the landlord, "pride allus goes before a fall—that's a well-known thing, is that—I've heard my owd mother pass that remark a many times."

"Well, he's a consarned owd fool, is Cornelius Vandy Lindy," asserted the butcher. "I hear a good deal i' t' exercise o' my callin', and I say 'at ye can't throw a handsome lad like yon and a fine young wench like Cornelius's dowter together, wi'out summat happenin'. Theer's such a thing as human natur' i' this world—don't mak no mistak!"

The young farmer voiced a certain coarse

jest, common to the country-side, that made Garrendon's blood tingle and his fists clench. He was about to walk out of the hall into the clear, unpoisonous sunlight when he heard the nurse calling him from the stairs and he turned to perform his professional duties.

When he left the "Duke of Orange" Garrendon went further afield to make other calls, and it was past his usual luncheon-hour when he returned home. He lived in a pretty house in an old-fashioned village three miles from Morcars-toft, in company with his sister, a woman a little older than himself, who had been devoted to him from childhood, and from whom, even during his student days, he had scarcely ever been separated. She was waiting for him in their dining-room when he entered—a pleasant-faced, kindly eyed woman, very like himself, with a sweet voice and gentle manners, and an attitude towards him which was as much that of a mother as of a sister.

"You look tired, John," she said, as they sat down to lunch.

"Yes," he replied, "I am tired—I had a rather longer round than usual. And the sun was very warm this morning, although we are in September."

Usually, these two talked a great deal during their meals. All their lives they had had many tastes in common. They read the same books, pursued the same studies, exchanged thoughts on both. But that day Garrendon was silent even to taciturnity—he scarcely spoke, and his sister noticed that he seemed to have little appetite for his food. Being a woman of great tact and good sense, she made no comment and forbore to ask questions. She knew, from long experience of him, that if he had any trouble he would tell her of it at his own time and in his own way, and with that knowledge of his complete trust in her, she was content to wait.

The brother and sister always spent a quiet hour together after lunch—the doctor over a cigar and a cup of coffee, Mary Garrendon over her fancy work or a new book. But Mary noticed that day that her brother was in no haste to light a cigar; he fidgeted about the room, looking first out of one window, then out of the other, staring at books and pictures and obviously seeing nothing that he seemed to stare at. At last, with an unconscious sigh, he took a cigar out of its box, lighted it, and sat down in his usual chair. After that there was silence for a little time—then he spoke.

"Mary," he said, "you and I have never had a secret from each other, have we, at any time?"

"Never!" she answered, emphatically.

"I was disturbed—troubled—put out—this morning," he said. "I went to the 'Duke of Orange' to see Mrs. Foulds, and while I waited in the hall I heard some men talking in the bar-parlour—Foulds himself, and that drunken sot, young Marshall, and Grinder, the butcher. And it wasn't pleasant hearing."

"What were they talking of?"

"Of the Van de Lindes."

Then he told her of all that he had overheard.

"What a hot-bed of scandal and back-biting a country village seems to be!" he exclaimed, bitterly. "I couldn't have believed that it could be what it is if I hadn't found it out for myself. Town life isn't like that."

"It may be that it is more noticeable in small places," Mary Garrendon said. "Country people have little to interest them."

"What troubles me," said Garrendon, "is that these people should say things like that. I think Mr. Van de Linde ought to know. And yet—I could not tell him."

His sister shook her head.

"No," she said, slowly, "you could not tell

him. And no one—no one—can stop evil-minded people from talking.”

“But it will spread,” he said, “that sort of thing always does.”

“Yes, no doubt. But who can stop that?”

He was silent for a moment; then he said in a low voice:

“And then it will come to Mr. Van de Linde’s ears—and to his daughter’s.”

“No one can stop that either, John.”

He uttered an exclamation of disgust, and for some time smoked furiously in silence. Then:

“Mary!” he said.

“Yes, dear.”

“When we were there to supper the other night, did you—did you think that—that she cared for Darrell?”

Mary Garrendon’s head was bent over her work, and she did not look up.

“No-o,” she answered. “I thought she was very much attracted to him, and by him, especially when he was playing to us. Why?”

He made no answer to this question, and suddenly looking up she saw that he was staring abstractedly into the fire. In an instant she had sprung to his side and thrown an arm round his neck and turned his face to hers. He

faced her bravely, but his eyes were miserable, and in them she read his secret.

“ John ! ” she said. “ John—dear ? ”

He got up and threw his cigar into the fire.

“ I’ve loved her ever since I first saw her,” he said. “ But it will never be any use ! ”

IX

CORNELIUS had gone away—gone away on what was, for him, a long journey. He was desirous of improving his breed of sheep, and hearing through private sources of a Wensleydale farmer who was not indisposed to part with two or three prize-winning rams, he determined to take a look at them himself, and at the same time to get a fleeting glimpse of a country which he had never seen but had heard much of. After much poring over the railway time-tables, he at last discovered that by catching a very early morning train at Doncaster he could get to Leyburn by way of York at a sufficiently early hour to enable him to spend some time at the sheep-farm, and yet return home the same day. His cob had accordingly carried him off to the train about six o'clock one morning—he himself as light-hearted as a school-boy who gets an unexpected holiday. It was not often that he left his farmstead, save for the usual visits to

the neighbouring markets and fairs and the annual trip to London for the Cattle Show, and he felt it a fine thing to shake a loose leg even for eighteen hours. Besides, anything north of York was to him a foreign country. He had heard that the Dalesmen spoke a different language to that to which he was accustomed—he comforted himself with the knowledge, however, that all men understand languages written in gold and silver and in crisp bank notes.

That was a day in the first week of October : a crisp, sunshiny day on which it was very good to be alive. There were gossamers hanging in silvery filaments all over the hedges in the morning, and the wide stretches of grass which bordered the level highroad sparkled as if some extravagant hand had strewn diamonds over their green carpets. But dew and gossamer alike had gone long before noon, and noontide found the land sleeping as the land only can sleep in an autumnal sunshine—calmly, happily, smilingly. It was the apotheosis of the year's peace. James was lazily gathering apples in the orchard ; from the tall elms across the highroad a russet leaf or two fell just as lazily to earth. Equally as lazily the leaves in thicket and hedgerow, wood and coppice, were changing

from green to yellow, from yellow to red. Languor—not the hot languor of summer, but the infinitely sweeter, more yearning and desirous languor of autumn—lay on everything.

Linda, her chin propped on her hands, her elbows propped on the dinner-table, her great dark eyes staring across the remains of the feast at Darrell, who was slowly and discriminatingly paring an apple and wholly engaged in his task, said suddenly :

“ Let’s go nutting this afternoon ! ”

Darrell looked up.

“ Nutting ? Can we find some nuts ? ”

“ Lots. I know a coppice where we can fill a basket in half an hour—splendid nuts.”

“ I should think they are all gone by this time.”

“ No, because the coppice is on our land, and no one would think of going into it.”

Darrell finished paring the apple and held up the unbroken peel with an air of triumph.

“ There ! ” he said.

Linda’s eyes flashed.

“ How fond you are of little things ! ” she said.

“ Yesterday, when we were out you spent a whole hour in making a ridiculous whistle, and never spoke to me once except to say ‘ Hum ’ and ‘ Hah ’ ! ”

Darrell looked at her with innocent eyes.

"But then, you see," he said, "I hadn't made a whistle for years!—since I was a child."

"But you're not a child now," she said.

Darrell bit into the apple with his strong white teeth. He looked at her with provoking innocence.

"I thought it was only children who went nutting," he said.

Linda stamped her foot. She rose and began to collect the silver.

"I shall be ready in half an hour," she said over her shoulder, as she carried the silver-basket away.

"So shall I," he replied, lighting a cigarette.

She paused and looked fixedly at him.

"I don't believe you want to go," she said.

He looked just as fixedly at her.

"You know very well that I do want to go," he said in a low voice. "I like to go anywhere with you."

She studied his face for a swift moment; then went away. When she came back—well within the half-hour—he saw that she was wearing something which he had never seen her wear before—a smart scarlet jacket and an

equally smart and coquettish toque of the same tint, perched a little on one side of her dark hair.

"How well scarlet suits your hair and eyes!" he said involuntarily.

She flashed a half-mischievous look at him.

"As well as the Dutch gown?"

"Better, I think."

"Perhaps you would like to paint me as I am?"

"I would like to paint you as you are at any time—at all times."

"Which would you rather do—paint me or make whistles?"

Darrell laughed.

"If you make whistles to-day I shall throw all the nuts away and come straight home. Take those two hooked sticks out of the stand."

While he was obeying this peremptory command, Linda produced a basket from a cupboard and slung it over her arm.

"Now we're ready," she said. "Come along."

Linda was right as to the nuts. The coppice was bursting with them, and they were just ready for gathering. Within half an hour they had filled the basket and Darrell was regretting that they had not brought another.

"What does it matter?" said Linda. "We can come again to-morrow."

"But what shall we do now?" he said.

Linda sat down on the trunk of a fallen tree, propped her elbows on her knees, put her round chin in the cup of her hands, and stared at the patches of sky which showed through the brown and yellow of the hazels.

"Throw them all away and get another basketful," she said. "And then throw that away and get a third—if you want something to do."

Darrell, who was filling his pipe, paused and stared at her.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

She flashed a swift look at him.

"Nothing's the matter," she said shortly.

Darrell completed the filling of his pipe to his own satisfaction. He began to feel for his match-box.

"I should say we shall have a touch of frost to-night," he said, looking around him and sniffing. "I can feel it in the air."

"How clever of you!" she said. "So can I."

Darrell found the match-box and lighted his pipe. He looked meditatively at Linda. She was conscious that he was looking at her, and

the kept her eyes steadily fixed on the patches of sky overhead.

"I say," he said, "that russet and gold would make a splendid background for your scarlet jacket."

Linda jumped to her feet.

"Let's go home," she said, and moved off.

"Home? Why, we've only just come!"

She half-turned and pointed to the basket.

"Bring the nuts," she commanded.

Going along the road they met a party of children returning from school, each member of which put his or her finger in his or her mouth and stood stock still at sight of the fine lady and gentleman. Linda paused.

"Would you like some ripe nuts?" she said addressing the eldest juvenile.

"Yes, miss, if you please, miss."

Linda took the basket out of Darrell's hand.

"Very well, there you are—share them out amongst you. And be sure to bring me my basket back when you come to school to-morrow."

As the children went one way and they another, Darrell said :

"I think you might have given me a handful of nuts—I helped to gather them."

"Did you really want some?"

"Yes, of course I did."

Linda gazed straight down the road.

"Why don't you go back and get some more, then? You said you wanted something to do."

Darrell whistled.

"Oh, so you want to make whistles now?" she said. "You can cut a nice piece of young ash out of the hedge there."

"I think it's you who are making whistles," said Darrell. "What is the matter?"

She turned and looked at him quite innocently

"Is anything the matter?" she asked.

Darrell rubbed his chin reflectively.

"I don't know," he answered lamely.

"Neither do I," she said. "Let's see—what were we talking about?"

"You," said Darrell, "were talking of—whistles."

"Now," she said with emphasis, "I will *not* talk to you again, and we *will* go straight home."

"We're only fifty yards from the garden gate now," said Darrell.

She marched straight upstairs as soon as they entered the stone hall, and he heard her slam her door. He laughed a little at that, and wondering what had caused this new revelation, sat down before the fire and smoked in comfort

for a long time until Linda reappeared from the kitchen regions, carrying the big silver lamp. She set it down on the centre table and lighted it, and then, as he turned towards her, came to him with a winning smile and outstretched hand.

"I believe I have been rude and horrid and nasty to-day," she said. "Forgive me!"

Darrell got a tight grip on himself. She had changed her gown for one all of white, which made her dark eyes and hair darker than ever. Her beauty called to him, set all his pulses throbbing, fired his blood—for one mad second which seemed an age he wanted to seize her in his arms, to feel her lips against his. . . .

"That's all right!" he said, with an effort at unconcerned cheeriness. "Perhaps you were feeling a bit—out of sorts, eh?"

She gave him a whimsical look.

"Perhaps I was in a bad temper?" she said, slyly.

"Oh, no, I don't think that!" he said hastily. "You are always so bright and cheerful, and, and——"

"Yes? And—and——?"

"And sensible," he said. "I couldn't think of you as bad-tempered."

"I can assure you that I have a very hot temper," she said. "Come, tea is ready."

As they sat at tea old Sarah came into the dining-room.

"Theer's a tallygraft for you, Miss Linda, and the boy says is theer onny answer," she said.

Linda tore the yellow envelope open and read the contents over with a puckered brow. Then she laughed and turned to the old woman.

"No, there's no answer, Sarah, thank you. Give the boy something to eat and drink."

She tossed the telegram over to Darrell with another laugh.

"Poor father!" she said. "This will be quite an event for him—he will talk about it for years."

Darrell read the message.

"Mr. Thornthwaite will have me to stay the night here won't let me go shall return to-morrow love to you best respects Mr. Darrell."

"That's the first time father has slept out of his own room for years," said Linda, "except when he goes to London for the Cattle Show, and that, of course, is all in the day's march."

That night she was as bright and cheerful as she had been moody and wayward in the after-

noon. They sat in the stone hall talking for a long time. She was never tired of asking Darrell about his travels and the places he had seen, and that night she asked him a question which she remembered afterwards.

"If you wanted a really peaceful retreat, where would you go?"

He answered without hesitation:

"To Bruges—in Belgium."

Later that evening he played to her for an hour, and at last, at her request, began to improvise for her. She came nearer and nearer to the piano as he played, until at last she sank into a low chair at its side and watched him steadily. . . .

The music stopped. They both stood up . . . at last their eyes met. She held out her hand. He was conscious that he took it, that they drew nearer, nearer . . . then his arm was about her waist, his lips on hers . . . and then, rosy red, but smiling divinely, she was gone.

Darrell stood trembling like a leaf. Suddenly he dropped into the nearest chair and covered his face with his hands. The Gifts of the Gods had come too near,

X

HALF an hour later, when Darrell turned out the light in the big silver lamp, the stone hall was suddenly illuminated as if day, bright and refulgent, had come again. He walked over to one of the windows and drew the blind aside, and could have cried out at the glory of the scene before him. Sailing upward through a sky made clear by the frost was such a moon as he had scarcely ever seen, in these or any other countries. It seemed twice as large as usual, and on this night it was at its full. He wondered, as he watched its rays gilding the tops of the trees and hedgerows and turning the roofs of the outbuildings to glistening planes of silver, how it was that he had not noticed it as it drew towards the full. Then he remembered that he had always gone to bed while the big lamp was burning (Cornelius always remaining behind to patrol the house and turn out the lights), and that his own room was heavily curtained.

He was glad that chance had revealed this marvellous sight to him.

He stood gazing out upon the moonlighted garden for some moments, and then dropped the blind, and sighing, for what reason he knew not, he took up his candle and went slowly to his room. His brain was still on fire, his pulses throbbing with the memory of the kiss he had given, and the kiss that had been given back. She had been so near to him in that intoxicating moment's embrace!—and she was so near now.

He sat for a long time on the edge of his bed, living that moment over again, seeing her, feeling her. Her great liquid eyes, her warm red mouth, the beating of her heart against his. . . .

He went to bed at last, but sleep was hard to woo. His mind was full of her.

“I shall have to go away,” he said. “I must go away—I must go away at once.”

After a long time he began to doze. On the borderland of sleep he thought he heard a light tapping at his door—so light that it might have been a bird pecking at a tree. He sat up and listened. The tapping went on; became a little louder. He thought he heard his name

whispered faintly. Darrell sprang out of bed and went to the door. As he reached it the tapping became still louder, and he heard Linda's voice pronounce his name distinctly.

"Yes?" he said, in a low voice.

"Please come!" she whispered back. "There is something wrong."

Darrell snatched down his dressing-gown, thrust his feet into a pair of bedroom slippers, and opened the door. She, too, was in her dressing-gown, her black hair falling in a great cloud over her shoulders and half-enveloping her, and her eyes, bigger and darker than ever in the moonlight which flooded the corridor, looked frightened.

"What is it?" asked Darrell. "What is it?"

She caught her breath a little.

"I am certain there is some one moving about in that little room where father keeps all his account-books and papers and the loose money," she whispered. "It is just under my room, you know. I—I couldn't sleep, and I have heard it two or three times. Come quietly and listen."

She led him to the open door of her room, and motioned him to follow her noiselessly inside.

"Listen!" she whispered.

Holding his breath, Darrell listened. And presently he heard a stealthy sound in the room beneath—a sound as of a slight crack.

"Did you hear it?" whispered Linda.

"Yes—I heard it. Come along."

She followed him into the corridor. Then he turned and looked at her.

"I'm going to slip a revolver into my pocket and go down," he said. "Don't be afraid. Is there a side staircase?"

"Yes—through that door. But it's old, and may creak. The hall staircase is better."

"All right. I'll have him, or them."

He turned into his room, felt for and found a revolver which he always carried in his portmanteau, and slipped it into the pocket of his dressing-gown. Then he went back to Linda.

"You wait at the top of the stairs," he said. "And if you hear me whistle, bring a light. I'll take care you're in no danger."

"But—you?" she said, unconsciously laying her hand on his arm.

"Don't be afraid—I'm a dead shot if it comes to a row. But it won't."

Then he went off, stealing gently along the corridor and down the stairs in the stone hall,

while Linda, going back to her room for a candle, shivered with fear as to what might happen. She crept slowly after him, and at the head of the stairs waited.

Presently she heard a door open, a sudden commotion, the sound of furniture overturned, and then Darrell's voice, firm and commanding.

"If you move another foot I'll shoot you. Stand there!"

Then came a sharp low whistle.

Linda lighted the candle and ran down the stairs to her father's little office-room. Just within the door stood Darrell, a very bright and business-like revolver in his right hand, levelled upon a loutish-looking lad of twenty or thereabouts who gazed at the deadly weapon with eyes full of horror. His teeth chattered; his knees shook; no burglar was ever less formidable. And at sight of Linda he screwed a couple of bony knuckles into his eyes and began to blubber.

Linda almost dropped her candle.

"Why—why!" she exclaimed. "It's Bob! Oh, Bob, how could you?"

Darrell slipped the revolver into his pocket and laughed.

"So the gentleman is known to you?" he said.

"Yes—he used to work here—he slept in the house—two years ago. Oh, Bob, what were you doing?"

But Bob was still knuckling his eyes.

"I'll tell you what he was doing," said Darrell. "He was trying to break open your father's desk. Weren't you, you scoundrel?"

"Don't speak harshly to him," said Linda. She went up to the culprit and laid a hand on his arm. "Tell me about it. Bob—what made you do such a dreadful thing? Don't cry, but tell me."

The culprit swallowed several large sobs.

"Wish I may die, Miss Lindy, if I ivver meant onny harm to eyther you or the maister!" he wailed. "But I were out o' wark, and nigh on to starvin', and I knew as how the maister allus kep' a matter o' money i' that theer desk, and I were desp'rate, like, and I knew how easy I could get into the house, 'cause theer's a windy i' th' back-kitchen 'at doesn't fasten reight, and I thowt a pound or two wodn't be missed—aw dear, aw dear! Don't send me to t' hoil, Miss Lindy, don't now!"

"You'll get five years for this, my man," said Darrell.

The would-be burglar howled.

"Aw, dear ; aw, dear ; aw, dear ! Whativver mun I do—whativver mun I do ! Aw, dear, aw, dear !"

"Or perhaps ten."

"Don't frighten him," said Linda. "Now, Bob, listen to me. Why didn't you come to us when you were in want ?"

"Doänt know, 'm. Aw, dear !"

"Have you ever done anything like this before, now, Bob ? Tell me the truth."

"Naw, mum—naw, Miss Lindy ! I'll tak' my solemn 'davy 'at I nivver did. Leastways I did once steal one o' Farmer Strawson's ducks, but I put t' vally on it i' t' collectin' box at t' chapel next Sunday."

Darrell burst into laughter.

"Be quiet !" said Linda. "Now, Bob, will you promise never, never, to do anything like this again ?"

"I will, Miss Lindy, I will, faithful ! I nivver meant no harm."

"Then I'll give you something to eat, and something to help you on with, and the day after to-morrow you'll come and ask Mr. Van de Linde for work—I shall not tell him what you've done to-night."

"I say—I say!" said Darrell. "You're compounding a felony, you know. The law——"

"What do I care for the law?" she said. "Stay there while I get him something to eat."

"I'm afeard o' bein' left alone wi' that theer gentleman," whined the favoured culprit. "I don't like that shinin' pistil—it flays me."

"Oh, he won't shoot you, now," said Linda, reassuringly. "He'll be very kind to you—for my sake," she whispered, as she passed Darrell on her way to the pantry. When she came back a few moments later she carried a parcel of food, and an old overcoat.

"Now then, Bob," she said, "here's something for you to eat, and here's a coat for you. And here's some money to help you on. Now go home, and do as I tell you about the day after to-morrow."

"Thank you, kindly, Miss. I'll do owt 'at you say, Miss. An' I'm sure 'at I nivver meant no harm. . . ."

"No—well, now, come along. We'll let him out at the front," she said to Darrell. "I'm so afraid of waking the servants—it's lucky they're right away on the other wing of the house."

When she had fastened the door upon the

baffled burglar's slinking figure she turned back into the stone hall to find Darrell standing near what remained of the fire. She went up to him, searching his face.

"It was the right thing to do," she said. "The poor lad's half-witted—he always was. It would have been cruel to send him to prison."

Then, with a sudden catch in her voice, she said :

"Did you see the moon—the harvest moon—the moon that comes when harvest is safely home ? Look !"

She blew out the candle, and moving over to the window, drew up the blind. The moonlight, strong and clear, flooded the stone hall, lit up her face, her dark hair, her great, liquid eyes.

"Good-night—for the second time," she said, coming back to him.

Once more they drew nearer and nearer . . . his lips sought hers again . . . she came into his embrace . . . and this time she stayed there.

A long, deep, drifting cloud, dark and menacing, came over the moon and plunged the land and the night into semi-darkness. When it passed, and the moon shone out again, the stone hall was empty and all the house was very still.

But the Gifts of the Gods had been given.

XI

SHE came down to him next morning, rosy and smiling, and gave him her good-day kiss as candidly as if she had been his for years of happy and understanding life. He took her into his arms and searched her eyes—she smiled back at him, blushing under his inspection.

“Heavens! how beautiful you are!” he breathed.

She laughed, patted his cheek, and pointed to the breakfast table.

“If I am as beautiful as I am hungry,” she said, “I must be a compound of all that is bewitching. Will you carve that cold ham?”

She talked with her usual lack of self-consciousness as they breakfasted, and her happiness would have been patent to any observer. She was bursting with it, and with life, and spirits, and health. But Darrell was quiet, and talked little, and at last his comparative silence struck her. She jumped up from her seat and coming

round the table put one arm round his neck and with her disengaged hand lifted his face to hers.

"You are very quiet—Adrian."

He smiled back at her.

"Perhaps I have much to think of—Linda."

She nodded.

"I know. Yes—we have much to think of. We must be good—and at present not think too much of ourselves. I am yours for ever, am I not?"

He drew her down to him and kissed her fondly.

"Yes, for ever!" he said.

She sighed deeply, kissed him on forehead, eyes, and lips, and patting his head as if he had been a small boy went back to her place.

Old Sarah came in with letters and newspapers.

"Here's the post, Miss Linda," she said.

Linda took the budget and began to turn it over.

"*Yorkshire Post—Mark Lane Express—The Field—The Queen* (that's my only extravagance, sir, but I must know how to dress myself) Cornelius—Cornelius—A. Darrell, Esq. (why Esq., when you're only a plain 'Mr.' and cheap at that!) more Cornelius's—lots of them—and nothing for me but a concert programme and

a dressmaker's bill. There's yours, Adrian dear."

Darrell took the letter which she handed to him and glanced carelessly at the handwriting on the envelope. A puzzled expression came into his face; he turned the envelope over. A sharp exclamation escaped his lips—he jumped to his feet, and crossing over to the window tore the letter from its covering and hastily read its contents.

When he turned round again Linda saw that his face was ashen pale. She was at his side on the instant, her hands on his shoulders, her eyes searching his.

"Adrian, dearest!—what is it? You have had bad news?"

He seemed to fight for speech.

"I must get up to town at once," he jerked out. "A—a relative is dead. What time is it—within a minute of nine? I can just catch the nine forty-five, but I shall have to ride hard. I must leave everything just as it is until—until I return. Let's see, the bicycle is in the porch, isn't it? Come—I must go just as I am. I must be in town this afternoon."

He hurried out into the stone hall, snatched up a cap and a pair of gloves from one of the

name nor address in any of them. She ran upstairs into his room. There were all his things lying about. She remembered that a portmanteau had been sent down to him after the painting of her picture was decided upon—she pulled it out of the cupboard and overhauled its contents. There was nothing but a quantity of clean linen and underclothing—she noticed, as people will notice unimportant things in the search for important ones, that all was of very fine quality ; she noticed also that nothing was marked.

She put the portmanteau back in the cupboard and looked around her. Two suits of clothes, both new, which had come down in the portmanteau, lay neatly folded on top of a low chest of drawers. She felt in the pockets of each. There was not a scrap of paper to be found anywhere. She examined the pockets of the dressing-gown and of the overcoat hanging behind the door—there was nothing in one, and only a pair of gloves and a briar pipe in the other. She looked in the chest of drawers, and found a quantity of pocket-handkerchiefs, a number of collars, a collection of neck-ties, somewhere about two dozens of pairs of socks, and the revolver which had so frightened the

would-be burglar. She picked this up forthwith, and holding it gingerly and at arm's length, carried it off and locked it up in a place of safety where she knew that no one but herself could ever get at it. Then she returned to the bedroom, having remembered that there was a dressing-case on the table which might contain some papers with his address on. The dressing-case was unlocked—she opened it expectantly. Everything in it was of solid silver ; she knew because of her acquaintance with the considerable stock of silver which lay in the family chest downstairs in the strong room, that it was all very old. But there were no papers. She was about to close the dressing-case when she noticed that one of the compartments which she had at first taken to be empty contained a small leather casket. Opening this she found it to contain a miniature, set in pearls and diamonds—a miniature of Darrell as a boy. Of that she was sure. She looked at it long and earnestly before she kissed it. A thought struck her—she compared the pearls and diamonds with those of a ring which he had slipped on the third finger of her left hand the night before. The pearls and diamonds in ring and miniature matched in every respect.

"I'll go to bed now, Linda joy," he said, wearily.

Linda's heart became heavy as lead. She gave him her arm in silence.

So Cornelius went to bed for the last time.

He was dead within three days, and sleeping with his forefathers within seven. Linda went about dry-eyed, and Mary Garrendon, who came to stay with her, prayed that she might break down and weep.

And so far no news of Darrell had come to her.

XIII

It was some little time before Linda Van de Linde awoke to the realisation of fact. She went about the house mechanically, day after day, discharging her accustomed duties. With the exception that its master no longer went out and came in, strolled about the garden of a morning and sat in his chair by the fire o' nights, the old place looked just the same. Linda took his duties upon herself. There was a capable foreman in charge of the labourers, a man who had been in the employ of Cornelius for twenty years—with him Linda took counsel every morning as to what was to be done on the land. She had always identified herself with her father's interests, and had a good, practical knowledge of farming, and as the foreman was trustworthy and hard-working the machinery of the farm rolled on as smoothly as ever. There was nothing missing in the fields and meadows but Cornelius himself on his old cob.

"Why does Lord Illingham wish to buy what I do not want to sell?"

They explained to her that by the terms of her father's will the estate must be sold.

"I thought that everything was mine," she said. "If it is, why cannot I do what I like with it?"

They made further explanations. She listened to them with a frown.

"I meant to go on living here, and to farm the land myself," she said, somewhat angrily. "If you sell the house and land to Lord Illingham shall I have to leave Morcarstoft?"

They told her that the house would be wanted for a new tenant.

"Is the furniture to be sold, too, then?" she asked, looking round about her at the familiar objects in the stone hall, where they were sitting in company with Mary Garrendon.

No, they answered, the furniture, plate, linen were all at her own disposal—hers absolutely.

"I do not want it all," she said. "Lots of it can be sold. I shall choose what I want, and you can sell the rest. And, pray, where am I to live?"

Mr. Laidman pointed out to her that she could live wherever she pleased. She would be suffi-

ciently well-to-do to live in any place that took her fancy. She would have at the very least fifteen hundred pounds a year to live upon—probably more, but quite that, at the very lowest estimate. Therefore, she could pick and choose.

She looked at the two men for some time without speaking: then she once more glanced round the place of which she had so many various memories, sad and happy.

“It really doesn’t matter,” she said. “I wanted to stay here—I wish my father had left things so that I could have stayed here. But since I can’t—well, do what you think best, and tell me when I am to go.”

XIV

OCTOBER passed ; November passed ; Christmas came and went ; the New Year dawned, and yet no news came to her of Adrian Darrell. Every morning throughout that weary time she used to come down heart-sick with longing for the sight of a letter ; every knock that came to the door made her pulses leap with a wild hope that it might be his, and that in another moment she would feel his arms about her and his face against hers. But day after day went by, and nothing happened. He might have been swallowed up into the blackness which nothing mortal can penetrate. She went about her work in the usual way ; held consultations with the foreman ; gave orders to the servants ; saw that the house was kept up to its usual standard of neatness and order ; took care that the garden was looked after according to her father's ideas ; cleaned silver ; dusted china ; ate, drank, and, as well as she could, slept. Every

day, forcing herself to do it, she went out for a sharp walk—every day saw her take that walk in the same direction—towards Doncaster. Something told her that it was foolish, but she always expected to meet Darrell—and always went back, lonely and sore hearted.

Long since, soon after the death of Cornelius, she had locked the door of Darrell's room and put the key in her pocket. She used to visit it every day, brush the clothes which he had left, arrange and fold them, and leave the room just as he had left it. It should be ready for him when he came back. In the stone hall the easel with his unfinished picture on it still stood just where he had last placed it—on the little table at its side lay his painting materials, his brushes uncleansed, his palette, uncleaned. In the window-seat close by lay his sketch-books, some odds and ends of paper on which he had made an outline or two ; the ashen whistle about which she had teased him ; a tobacco pouch, open ; a book ; a pipe ; a stick—all just where he had carelessly thrown them. She would have none of them touched. On the occasion of Cornelius's funeral somebody had suggested removing all these things, seeing that so many guests would be present—she had forbidden their

removal with an imperious sternness, and with her own hands had fetched two great screens from the parlour and had screened the corner off. Nothing should be touched until he came, or until she had to leave the old place for ever.

Mary Garrendon came to sit with her every day, but got little conversation out of her. She used to sit for hours in her favourite attitude ; her elbows propped on her knees, her rounded chin in the cup of her hands, her great eyes staring fixedly at the leaping flames on the hearth. And after three months had gone by Mary Garrendon could bear it no longer and one afternoon she spoke.

" Linda," she said, laying her hand on the girl's shoulder. " You're in great trouble ; you know you are."

" Well ? "

" And it's not because of your father's death, you know."

" Well ? "

Mary Garrendon hesitated—Linda's voice was hard and dry.

" Come, Linda, tell me. Isn't it, now—tell me—are you in love with Mr. Darrell ? "

Linda laughed. She turned and looked at Mary Garrendon with half-closed eyes as if she

were endeavouring to estimate her mental capacity.

"I should think any fool could see that!" she replied, half-scornfully.

Mary Garrendon put the retort aside.

"Linda, be frank with me—was there anything between you before he went away?"

Linda's voice was hard as ever.

"We loved each other—if that's what you mean. Of course we did—we were madly in love with each other from the very first moment we met—madly."

"Then, Linda, why doesn't he come back to you?"

Linda shrugged her shoulders.

"Of course, he writes to you?"

Linda shrugged her shoulders again.

"I have never heard a word of or from him since he went away," she answered.

"Linda! All that time! And you think that a man can love you who can treat you in that way? Why, it's——"

Linda sprang to her feet with blazing eyes and hot cheeks.

"Don't you dare to speak to me like that!" she burst out. "I know he loves me—know, do you hear? Do you think I don't trust him?"

Then she flung out of the place, and Mary Garrendon, knowing that she would not reappear that day, went home, very sad and sorrowful.

It was about three weeks after that, just as February was setting in, that John Garrendon, who had been with his co-executor to see Linda on business, came reeling like a drunken man into his sister's parlour, and, when he had calmed down, told her in broken sentences something that sent her off post-haste on her bicycle to Morcarstoft. She came back two hours later to find him pacing up and down the parlour like a caged wild beast.

"Well?" he said. "Well?"

She shook her head.

"It's true, John," she answered. "It's quite true. She admitted it."

He stared at her for a moment like a man distraught: then he said, "Very well, I shall go to London to-morrow morning. I'll find him!"

XV

THEY talked far into the night, these two, as to what steps Garrendon might take in London towards finding Darrell. Mary Garrendon knew that Linda possessed next to no information about him, that she did not even know his address; that, oddly enough, although he had lived in her father's house for nearly a month she had never even seen his handwriting. Brother and sister alike knew that Garrendon's mission must be kept secret from her—she would have been furious had she known that he had gone to seek her lover. That he must go, in her interest, and in fulfilment of the trust which Cornelius had reposed in him, was, however, evident.

“And yet whatever can you do?” said Mary. “To find one man amongst millions!—think of it!”

“There are not millions nor thousands nor even hundreds of men like that,” replied

This, however, was not to go on for always. When Cornelius Van de Linde's will was opened it was found that with the exception of some legacies to his servants and workmen and due provision for his two old pensioners, Matthew and Sarah Jennett, he had left everything of which he died possessed to his daughter, with instructions that his estate should be sold, either privately or at auction, and the proceeds invested in one or other of certain approved securities. This sale was to take place if possible within six months of his death: Linda's stay at Morcarstoft was therefore but a matter of a short time.

Cornelius had named two executors of his will—one of them his solicitor, Mr. Laidman, of York; the other, Dr. Garrendon. There was found a letter with the will addressed to Garrendon, in which the old man begged the doctor to accept this trust as a proof of the high esteem in which he, Cornelius, held him. Garrendon would far rather have been free of the duties imposed upon him—in some way it seemed to put a bar between himself and Linda, and although he had said to his sister that it would “never be any use,” he was still hoping against hope that he might eventually win her. But

when he re-read the old man's letter, and saw how laboriously Cornelius had endeavoured to make his meaning plain, he readily consented to undertake the task.

When he and his co-executor had their first business conversation with Linda they were able to tell her that she was a well-to-do woman. Cornelius had always been a thrifty and a saving man; he himself had often been heard to say that he had never had a really bad year from the time he inherited Morcarstoft from his father, who, moreover, in addition to the farm had left him a nice little fortune. There was a good deal of money invested in first-class securities; a considerable sum in the hands of the bankers; the house, land, and dead and live stock would produce a small fortune in themselves. Already there was a handsome offer for the house and land; one of the great neighbouring land-owners, knowing the high pitch of perfection to which Cornelius had brought his farm, and anxious to add the Morcarstoft property to his own, which ran up to it, had hastened to make an offer for it which Mr. Laidman felt to be an exceedingly good one.

"But I do not wish to sell Morcarstoft," said Linda, when they put this offer before her.

"It's all been of no use, Mary," he said. "I haven't so much as even come across a trace of him—not a trace."

He took the cup of coffee which she handed him, drank a little, and went on. "I got hold of Demmler, and told him everything, though of course I didn't mention Linda's name. He has spent every day—the whole of each day—with me, trying to trace him. It was utterly useless. Demmler knows everybody and everything in art circles—he took me all over, into all sorts of artists' clubs, societies, and places where artists meet. No one had the slightest recollection of Darrell from my description of him. It is certain that he has never exhibited in London—at any rate under his own name—for the past twelve years, and of course before that he would be a mere child. If he has lived there it must have been like a hermit, and in absolute independence of his art. Nobody knows anything of him—artists, critics, dealers. But I have formed an impression of my own, and Demmler shares it."

"And that is——?"

"That his name here was an assumed one. However, there we are. I've failed—and I've been so thorough in my investigations that I

don't see how any one else can succeed. Now, Mary, listen to me. Linda must be got away at once—at once! Let her go wherever she pleases. But—you must go with her, Mary."

Mary Garrendon put her hand on her brother's shoulder.

"John, it will be the first time we've been separated! And what will you do?"

He looked at her steadfastly.

"Do you think I shan't feel it, dear?" he said. "Shan't I? But it's the right thing to do, Mary, it's the right thing to do. We must stand by her! You must go with her, and stick to her, and I must get a housekeeper. You'll make me all the happier by doing this. I shall know she's—safe."

Mary stooped and kissed her brother.

"Very well, John," she said. "I'll stand by her."

Early next morning Mary Garrendon went down to Morcarstoft and found Linda gathering snowdrops in the garden. She drew her inside the stone hall and made her sit down.

"Linda, dear," she said, gently but with firmness, "you must go away from here."

Linda stared at her.

"Go away? But why should I go away?"

"You must go away because—because of what is going to happen."

Linda began to bunch the snowdrops. Her mouth and eyes grew mutinous.

"Think, Linda, dear, of your father."

Linda let the snowdrops fall—her lips quivered.

"Yes," she said in a softer voice than Mary had heard for a long time. "Yes, I see. Very well, I will go."

"And I shall go with you—and stay with you."

Linda threw her arms round the elder woman's neck and kissed her impulsively. Then a cloud came over her face.

"But when Adrian comes—because he will come—how will he know where to find me?" she said.

"That is easy. John will see that he is sent on to you. And now, Linda, where would you like to go? Because, dear, we must go at once."

Linda sat musing in silence for a time. Suddenly the memory of a question and an answer flashed across her. Again she saw the autumn fireside; again she saw Darrell and herself sitting in its cheery glow; again she heard her own voice and his.

"If you wanted a really peaceful retreat, where would you go?"

"I would go to Bruges—in Belgium."

She turned to Mary Garrendon and laid her hand on hers.

"I will go to live in Bruges—in Belgium," she said

Nobody made any objection to that—she would be able to live like a princess in Bruges, on her ample income. And so matters were quickly settled. She was to mark all the articles of furniture which she required, and when she and Mary Garrendon had found a house in Bruges to their liking, they were to be shipped over to her. She would be able, with all that fine old furniture, with her silver, her china, her glass, her stores of linen, to set up quite an establishment.

There was one thing she did before leaving. With her own hands she packed into one trunk everything which Adrian had left; she superintended the packing by workmen of the unfinished picture. And these things she took with her.

END OF PART ONE



PART TWO
***IN BRUGES—TWELVE YEARS
LATER***

I

It was a May morning in Bruges, and the quaint old Flemish city smiled back at the sky and the sun. Sunlight and springtide were everywhere—in the little lonely squares and narrow streets as in the wide expanse of the Grand Place. The sunlight dwelt lovingly on the great tower of the Cathedral and on the graceful spire of Nôtre Dame; it played about the old Belfry, wooing the music of the chimes within, and danced and glided on hundreds of queer old roofs and gables. The springtide laughed in many a nook and corner, and watched its own reflection in the mirror of the Minnewater and in the placid basins of the quiet canals. Everywhere the spirit of springtide peace reigned supreme. The thrifty housewives had long since finished their marketing, and were now busied behind closed doors in their domestic avocations; everybody, except a few belated ones, had been to Mass and gone home again; in all the place there was a

sense of mid-morning rest. In the Rue de Sud Sablon and in the Rue des Pierres there was something of life, for there are the best shops and thither the tourists repair, but in the Grand Place there was a delightful solitude. An officer looked out of the window of the Civil and Military Club; he twirled a very black moustache in a thoughtful manner, and his dark eyes were melancholy with the sweetness of spring. An elderly man read a newspaper in front of one of the little café-restaurants; now and then he sipped languidly at a glass of coffee which stood in its metal holder at his elbow. In the middle of the square two boys, bare-legged and black-pinafores, were playing tricks with a poodle; at the entrance to the museum under the Belfry, the custodian, hands in pockets and cap on one side, stood idly looking about him. A vendor of milk, his cart drawn by two great dogs, came round the corner from the Rue Flamande and clattered over the stones towards the Rue des Pierres; a mounted officer, very spick and span, rode a chestnut charger across the Grand Place in the direction of the post office. The rattle and jingle of the milk-cans in the dog-drawn cart; the stamp of the horse's feet; the joyous barking of the poodle—these were all the sounds

which broke the stillness until from the great Belfry overhead stole the silver sounds of its matchless carillon chiming the three-quarter hour.

Almost as quiet as its sunlit Grand Place was the rest of Bruges that morning. Here and there men hung over the little bridges which span the canals and watched the white swans sailing gracefully about the green waters; here and there men came and went along the quay-sides. In the outer streets women, old and young, sat at their doors, making lace; in the courtyards of the convents, superintended by some placid-faced, meek-eyed nun, classes of young working girls were busy—also making lace. Near the Porte de Damme there was perhaps more evidence of life and bustle; in the Place de la Station there was the usual assemblage of loafers and leisured, awaiting the immense excitement of the arrival of a train from Ostend or the mail from Brussels. But in most of the streets and the little tree-shaded squares, each with its statue or its monument of some great hero, goldier, statesman, artist, there was nothing but profound peace. High walls, through which it seemed impossible for aught of the outside world to penetrate, shut out seminaries, schools,

convents, presbyteries from extraneous life—never was such a city, the stranger would say, for these institutions or for hospitals and refuges for the sick and needy. And all round the place, fringed in places by long belts of poplar and aspen, wound the canals, spanned here and there by the ancient gates, stern and frowning as in the old days when the Baldwins were lords of the level land which stretches north and south and east and west as far as the eye can see from the summit of the Belfry.

There was no quieter spot in Bruges that morning than the Béguinage—that paradise of peace within whose walls the world seems so far off as to be for ever unreachable again. The trees in its midst, now full of fresh green foliage, cast entrancing shadows on the quaint little houses which surround the turfed quadrangle; the little houses themselves, with their queer chimneys, eccentric gables, old-world windows, and tightly shut doors, looked like nuns at prayer, whom nothing can disturb. Not more quiet was the high spire of Nôtre Dame, piercing the clear blue of the May morning.

Yet there were abundant evidences of life in the Béguinage, quiet and peaceful as it was. No one who can make the faintest pretension to

even an elementary acquaintance with art ever visits Bruges without attempting at least a pencil sketch of the retreat which Jane of Constantinople endowed so liberally nearly eight hundred years ago. There are so many things within its precincts that are as notable as they are picturesque—the old gateway at the head of the bridge which crosses the shining Minnewater; the ancient chapel with its tombs, its paintings, its carved wood, its monumental brasses; the queer-fronted houses; the tall trees; the wonderful lights and shades on the wide stretch of vividly green turf. And so in springtide and in early summer, and in fact whenever travellers are in Bruges, one finds easels set up here, and sketch-books on knee there, and the Béguinage is being transferred to canvas or to paper—happily, in silence.

On this particular morning there were a great many artists of all sorts in and about the Béguinage. On the bridge outside, an obviously English bridegroom was adjusting his camera while his obviously English bride, fair of hair and blue of eye, was making a hurried pencil-sketch of the old gateway. Within the sanctuary itself a man with a velvet coat and very long hair had set up a canvas of some size and was sketching

in a general view of the place. Under the trees various young ladies, whose severely cut skirts leather-belted waists, and plain blouses seemed to proclaim them English, were working with brush or pencil, each at some particular subject which had taken her fancy. Under the trees, also, or around the roadway which enclosed the quadrangle, or on the pebble-paved paths which intersected it, slowly moved folk who were doing nothing more than was required to drink in the spirit of the place as they drank in the air of the May morning.

In one of the quietest corners of the Béguinage, seated on a camp-stool which he had placed beneath an overshadowing tree in such a position that he could when he chose lean back and rest himself against the trunk, a boy was thoughtfully regarding a water-colour sketch which filled a page near the end of an already well-furnished sketch-book. On another camp-stool at his side lay his box of colours, his brushes and pencil, all set out with mathematical precision. Now, after viewing his picture from various angles, he mixed some more colour, took up his brush again, and set soberly to work, quite unconscious of the fact that a stranger who had been strolling about the Béguinage for some

time had drawn near and was watching him intently.

It seemed to the stranger that this boy might be eleven or twelve years old. He was a big boy, tall and well-knit for his age, of a very graceful and slim figure, which was shown to advantage by a plain, but perfectly cut suit of Scotch tweed. Something in that suit, in the snowy turn-down collar which topped the jacket, in the neatly tied sailor's knot, in the straw hat which its wearer had thrown on the ground at his side, suggested an English atmosphere to the looker-on. He set down the youthful artist as an English school-boy on holiday.

But when the boy lifted his face again the stranger was puzzled. It was a handsome face, pure oval in outline, pure olive in tint, and crowned by a mass of the blackest and curliest hair that ever boy wore. Some hand had recently reduced this luxuriant growth to reasonable dimensions—there were no stray locks falling about ears or over collar—the shapely head was close-cropped if anything. But what remained was obviously rebellious—there could never be any parting in that blue-black mass, which formed itself into rings and twists and curls and tendrils from the nape of the neck

a bearded face—a soft, silky beard and moustache, dark as his hair and carefully trimmed to a point beneath his chin. Whatever his position as an artist, thought the boy, it was clear that he was of position in the world. His suit of light flannel was shaped to perfection; the white Homburg hat which covered his dark hair was of superlative quality; on the hand which held the sketch-book glittered two magnificent rings. Not a poor artist, this, at any rate.

The boy waited for a verdict, watching the man with parted lips and expectant eyes. The stranger twisted the sketch-book this way and that, nodded at it two or three times, and handed it back.

“That is capital—capital!” he said, enthusiastically. “It is more than capital—it is excellent. You have been very carefully taught?”

The boy shook his head.

“No, monsieur. I have had very little teaching. Drawing, yes, when I was at the school—freehand drawing, you understand, monsieur. But beyond that, nothing. Monsieur Verbeke says——”

“Yes?” said the stranger encouragingly, seeing that the boy was somewhat diffident.

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“Monsieur Verbeke, who teaches me Latin and mathematics, says that I should go some day to Antwerp or Rome,” said the boy.

“Monsieur Verbeke is right. You have not visited either place, then ? ”

The boy shook his head and began to darken a shade in his picture.

“No, monsieur. I have not travelled—except that I once accompanied my mother to England—to London.”

“Ah, you know London ? ”

“Yes, monsieur—my mother is English.”

“Did you like England ? ”

The boy nodded his curly head.

“On the whole, monsieur, yes. It was in what they term the season that we were there—that is two years ago. We went to their Royal Academy exhibition of pictures—I did not care much for most of the work I saw there. Perhaps I did not understand.”

“Or understood too well ! ” laughed the stranger. “But in their National Gallery——”

“Oh, yes, monsieur ! I spent many days there—looking—looking—looking ! That was fine—wonderful. Yet we have many great and noble works here in our own city.”

“Ah, indeed, yes ! ”

"You know Bruges, monsieur ?"

The stranger sighed.

"It was many years since I was here," he said reflectively. "Once I used to spend much time here. You are a native ?"

"Yes, monsieur. I was born here—I love Bruges."

The boy spoke with a naïve simplicity which was curiously blended with an old-fashioned solemnity of manner. The stranger felt emboldened to ask questions.

"It is your wish to become an artist ?"

The boy's black eyes shot out gleams of gold as he turned a flushed cheek towards his interlocutor.

"But yes, monsieur ! It is all I care for—that and my violin."

"Would not your father let you go to Antwerp, then ?—better still, to Italy, to Rome ?"

"My father died before I was born, monsieur. But my mother has promised that in time I shall go to Antwerp. All the same, I would much rather go to Italy. It is my dream."

Then after a brief silence, he said, half-shyly.

"Do you think I shall succeed if I persevere, monsieur ?"

The stranger nodded his head emphatically.

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"Yes, indeed!" he said. "You have a fine sense of colour and a true eye. Practise and study—practise and study! I should like you to see Italy—its colour, its atmosphere."

The boy sighed.

"You know Italy well, monsieur? Rome doubtless?"

"Yes—I live in Rome."

"Ah!"

This exclamation conveyed much. The stranger answered it quickly.

"Patience!" he said. "You will find yourself in Rome one of these days. All roads lead to Rome."

Then with a laugh and looking at his watch, he added:

"Mine just now leads to Ostend and Dover and London—and my watch reminds me that in three hours from now my train leaves Bruges. I am also reminded that it is time for *déjeuner*. Will you come and share my meal at the Hotel de Flandre? Then we can talk a little more—I am interested in your work."

The boy's face flushed again.

"Monsieur is very kind and gracious," he said.

"Your mother would not be anxious——" began the stranger.

"To-day," said the boy, "my mother has gone to Brussels to see friends. If you wish my society, monsieur, I will tell our housekeeper that I am invited to *déjeuner*—we shall pass our house on the way to the Flandre."

"Excellent!" said the stranger.

The boy began to arrange his colour-box, his brushes, his pencils. He waved his sketch-book about in the air—convinced at last that it was dry he bestowed it and the colour-box in an old-fashioned satchel which he carried slung round his shoulders. Picking up his two camp-stools he made a little bow to the stranger, who was silently watching him and admiring the singular grace of his movements. Now that he was on his feet he proved to be tall for his age, and slimmer than he seemed to be when seated.

"I am at your service, monsieur," he said, with the old-fashioned courtesy of manner which the stranger found so charming and amusing.

Leaving the Béguinage together, these two made their way towards the Church of Notre Dame by the small side streets which open on the Rue Ste. Catherine. Near the church the boy paused in front of a large house, yellow walled, green-shuttered, the front of which seemed as impregnable as the doors of a convent.

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"If monsieur will have the grace to excuse my absence for one moment," he said, "I will explain to our housekeeper that I am engaged."

The stranger nodded, and the boy let himself into the house with a latch-key. In two minutes he came out again, smiling. The two paced along the street together in the direction of the Cathedral.

"We must introduce ourselves," said the stranger, feeling for a card-case.

"My name," said the boy with simple dignity, "is Pietje Van der Huysen."

The stranger repeated this name as if to make sure of it. He found his card-case and with a formal bow handed Pietje van der Huysen a card. The boy read it aloud, making a brave effort at the Italian.

IL SIGNOR MARCHÉSE DEL' ALBACCINA,
Palazzo Albaccina, Roma.

"You would soon pronounce Italian beautifully," laughed the Marquis.

Pietje slipped the card into his waistcoat pocket.

"I know who you are now, Monsieur the Marquis," he said gravely. "It is a great honour that you do me."

II

THE Hotel de Flandre, which stands half-way down the Rue Nord du Sablon, is one of those delightful old-world hostelries which modernity has not yet succeeded in spoiling. True, it has caught the spirit of the times and is what is called up to date in all respects—nevertheless, something about it serves to remind one of old Flemish days, especially when one lies awake in one's bed at night and hears the silver carillon stealing in heavenly cadences through the open window of one's room. True that here one lunches and dines in a fashion worthy of the best and most modern of the large twentieth-century caravansaries of London or Paris or New York—but there is a little procession of domestics going bedwards with lighted candles every night as the clock strikes ten, which might be a bit of the seventeenth or even the fifteenth century. True that here the American tourist is heard—but there is a divine old garden at the

back in which birds sing and flowers grow, and where there is enough left of the old house to show what a Flemish inn of the old days was like. In house and garden there is a sense of rest—not even broken when the queer, rumbling, racketing steam tram-train comes serpentine along the narrow street outside, on its way to Heyst and the Dutch frontier.

The Marquis of Albaccina and his new friend Pietje Van der Huysen, walked into the long, low, cool hall of the Hotel de Flandre precisely as the Angelus began to ring in the towers and spires of the churches, and as the chimes in the Belfry-tower proclaimed with joyous music the birth of another noon. They turned into the *salle-à-manger*—it was as cool there as in the hall, and the gold and white of the walls seemed to invite many emotions and feelings. Pietje suddenly realised that he was hungry—he took his seat opposite his new friend with pleasurable anticipations. Then the head waiter came up, anxiously and kindly solicitous that all should be to the liking of the great Italian nobleman and his guest. Him Pietje greeted solemnly as a very old friend.

“Good-day, Monsieur Joseph,” he said, with his grave bow. “It is a beautiful morning.”

Monsieur Joseph, who had known Pietje since his infancy, bowed with equivalent politeness.

“Good-day, Monsieur Van der Huysen,” said he. “A beautiful morning indeed, monsieur.”

Then, seeing that all was in order, he hurried off to get the *hors-d'œuvres*. Pietje glanced at his hands and rose.

“If Monsieur the Marquis permits,” he said, “I will retire to wash my hands, upon which there is paint. I would have washed them at home, but I did not wish to keep monsieur waiting in the street.”

He bowed and quitted the *salle-à-manger*. Monsieur Joseph came back with his little dishes and arranged them deftly.

“You know my young friend?” said the Marquis.

“But yes, Monsieur the Marquis—oh, quite well indeed! The son of the Widow Van der Huysen. A fine boy!—the handsomest boy, monsieur, in all the city.”

“And his mother is, you say, a widow?”

“Alas, it is so, Monsieur the Marquis. A young widow, too. And so handsome! There are many gentlemen who would lay their fortunes at her feet. But no! It is for her son only that Madame lives.”

"I trust," said the Marquis, "that Madame Van der Huysen is well provided for?"

Monsieur Joseph nodded his round head several times with great satisfaction.

"Indeed, yes, Monsieur the Marquis. Oh, la, yes! Madame is one of the richest in Bruges. She is, monsieur will understand, an English woman."

"Ah, of course!" said the Marquis. "That explains."

"Monsieur van der Huysen returns," said Monsieur Joseph. He drew Pietje's chair aside for him, and within a moment was smilingly admiring the boy's healthy attack on the olives and anchovies.

"I like this place," said Pietje, a little later, when Joseph had departed for the omelette. "And Monsieur Joseph is, they say, one of the most accomplished waiters outside Paris. Now and then, when we wish to make a holiday, my mother and I come and dine here. We make believe that we are thousands of miles away from home."

"That," said the Marquis, smiling, "no doubt adds greatly to the joy of the occasion."

"Yes," replied Pietje. "Yes—it does, monsieur."

The Marquis consulted the *carte-du-vins*.

"Do you drink anything, Pietje?" he asked.

"I am allowed half a glass of red wine if it is filled up with water," the boy answered with his old-fashioned solemnity. "And I will have that wine which I had when Madame and I were here last, if you please, Monsieur Joseph—it is very good and sound wine, that."

During the comfortable process of *déjeuner*, and afterwards over their coffee in the pleasant garden, where a stone lion of Flanders made dreadful threatenings upon a real live fawn kept in a wired enclosure, the Marquis learnt much of Pietje and his history. The boy was evidently of a frank and candid nature. He obtruded nothing, but showed no unnatural reserve—sometimes he voiced opinions which sounded oddly in one so young, but his senior could find no fault with them, especially when they touched on subjects relating to art. He reflected, too, that many of these opinions must necessarily have arisen in Pietje's mind as the result of his training, and he began to feel a great curiosity about the boy's mother. He had soon found out that Pietje had no brothers and sisters, and that he and his mother were all

in all to each other, that she had devoted herself to her son from his babyhood.

"Your mother must be a very clever woman," he said.

"My mother is the most beautiful and the wisest woman in Bruges," replied Pietje with grave simplicity. "All who know her say so—it must therefore be so, monsieur, must it not?"

"*Securus judicat orbis terrarum*," murmured the Marquis.

"Precisely, monsieur—that, as Monsieur Verbeke says, is as sound doctrine as when it was first pronounced. It is Monsieur Verbeke's favourite quotation—he is very orthodox and devout."

"Monsieur Verbeke, then, is your tutor?"

"Yes, Monsieur the Marquis. Since three years ago. Formerly—for two years—I went to the seminary at the end of the Rue d'Argent, but it was not good for my health—there was then something wrong with my chest, and the doctors ordered that I must pursue my studies at home. So then my mother engaged Monsieur Verbeke. We are great friends, he and I—I am very fond of him, though he is now getting an old man."

"And he teaches you—what?"

“ Chiefly Latin and mathematics, monsieur—but we read much history together. I love history. Just now my mother and Monsieur Verbeke and I are reading ‘Green’s History of the English People.’ ”

“ Ah ! ” said the Marquis. “ Since your mother is English, you doubtless speak the English language ? ”

“ Oh, yes, monsieur ! I speak English much more readily than French—we speak English in our house, because, as you say, monsieur, my mother is English. Do you speak English, monsieur ? ”

The Marquis sipped his coffee.

“ Yes, I speak English,” he answered. “ But I do not find much occasion to do so except when I visit England or meet English friends in Italy. But since it is your ambition to visit Rome you must learn Italian.”

“ Yes, monsieur,” said Pietje with great obedience. “ That is what I would wish. I will make time to do so.”

“ Your time, then, is fully occupied ? ” said the Marquis, who continued to converse in French.

“ Oh, indeed, yes, Monsieur the Marquis ! My mother is always at work herself—always

doing something in the house, or going to see the sick people, or visiting the poor folk at the Holy Spirit or the Incurables—hospitals, you know, monsieur—and she thinks that no one should ever be idle.”

“Your mother is an admirable and a wise woman,” murmured the Marquis.

“I thank you, monsieur. And so, of course, since my mother is always so busy I too must be busy.”

“Of course,” said the Marquis.

“For one cannot permit one’s mother to do more than one does oneself, can one?” continued Pietje with an air of profound wisdom. “Oh, I assure you, monsieur, I am never idle!”

“And how do you spend your day?” inquired the Marquis.

Pietje put his hands in his pockets and knitted his dark brows.

“Well, monsieur, before I take my coffee I practise upon my violin for an hour. After I have taken my coffee I look over my work for Monsieur Verbeke, who comes to me at nine. We work until twelve—between twelve and half-past, when *déjeuner* is served, I play tennis with my mother—we have a beautiful court in

our garden, and an asphalt one for the winter months, also. After *déjeuner* I go to Monsieur van Oost for my violin lesson. That over, my day is my own until dinner time at seven o'clock. Sometimes I go on excursions with my mother, but usually I sketch or paint. In the evening I do my work for Monsieur Verbeke and play the violin to my mother, or she plays the piano to me. She plays the piano very finely, my mother, yet she still takes lessons upon it from Monsieur van Oost. Once, she says, she could scarcely play the piano at all—a strange thing to me, monsieur, for I could play the violin when I was six years old. And after that I go to bed.”

“At the end of a good day’s work, Pietje,” laughed the Marquis. “Now, tell me—do you study Bruges much?”

Pietje inclined his curly head more solemnly than ever.

“Yes, monsieur—I have explored every nook and corner of Bruges. I know it as well as I know my own room.”

The Marquis lighted another cigar.

“Tell me what you consider its chief beauties and treasures,” he said, designing to find out what the boy’s powers of observation were.

Pietje reflected. He took his chin in his hand,

his dark eyes became gloomy with thought. Presently he spoke.

“Monsieur the Marquis would naturally wish to hear first of the art of Bruges,” he began. “Well, monsieur——”

The Marquis listened intently while the boy talked with all the gravity of a professor on the art treasures, the history of art, in his native city. He soon found that the lad knew what he was talking about. He began to speak of art as it existed in Bruges prior to the days of the Van Eycks; of the wonderful water-colour drawings of the fifteenth century which had been discovered hidden away in tombs in Bruges itself, and at St. André on the west, and at St. Croix on the east, or lying concealed under thick coatings of disfiguring whitewash in the great churches of St. Saviour and Nôtre Dame. Then of the Van Eycks themselves, Hubert and John, who solved the secret of mixing colours, and abolished the old gilt and diapered backgrounds in favour of light and airy landscape. Then of Hans Memling, greater than even the Van Eycks, greatest indeed of all the artists which Bruges gave to the world before the Renaissance—and perhaps since—who founded a school, and saw at least one of his followers. Gerard David, attain

great fame and honour in his own lifetime. Then of the Renaissance, and of the influence of Quintin Matsys and of Gerard David upon its men—Provost, and Cornelis, and the two Pourbuses, Francis and Peter, whose pictures are still in such wonderful preservation because of some secret only known to the brothers. And the man, listening to the boy of the big eyes as he talked of these things, felt a great wave of understanding and sympathy sweep over his heart.

But Pietje could tell of more things than this. He knew all the old places in the city—the old houses in the Vieux Bourg, the Mason's House in the Rue des Pierres, the glories of the Franc de Bruges, and the beauties of the Quai du Rosaire, and he had evidently explored the Gruuthuus, where Louis of Bruges kept his state, from floor to ceiling. His mind was full of naught but pictures, churches, old houses, effects of light and shade on the canals, sunlit mornings and moonlit nights, painting, music—the mere mention of these things made his black eyes burn.

“But tell me, Pietje,” said the Marquis, “do you not care for games?—do you not play games with other boys?”

“Oh, yes, monsieur!—I play tennis a great

deal. My mother and I are very fond of tennis—we go out to tennis parties—sometimes quite into the country.”

“That is well,” said the Marquis. “You must not always be at work. Though I have no doubt that either painting or music is no work to you.”

“On the contrary, monsieur, they are the keenest pleasures. But in another year, when I am bigger and stronger I am going to learn fencing—I wish to fence well—it appeals to me.”

“Well, that is good exercise too, and a useful accomplishment. But, of course, the great ambition of your life is to be a painter?”

“Oh, yes, indeed, monsieur! It is my great ambition—my dream,” replied Pietje, with the fervour of a devout novice.

“Then you must come to Rome,” said the Marquis. “You know, perhaps, if you read the art journals that I have much influence there and could place you in due time with some great master.”

“I have read of Monsieur the Marquis often,” murmured Pietje, “and I have an engraving of his famous *April Morning in Rome*. But monsieur honours me too much.”

“No—no—you are full of great promise.

Only practise and study and never do unworthy things. But you must have a great master—sympathetic, understanding.”

“I shall tell my mother what you say, monsieur. She would have been glad to thank you for your kindness to me.”

The Marquis looked at his watch.

“If I could have remained one day longer in Bruges,” he said reflectively, “I would have made my bow to ~~Madame~~ your mother. But I must be in London to-night—I have a most important engagement there. And I cannot return by way of Bruges, either: I must go to Paris from London, and thence to Locarno. But I shall write to your mother from Rome and beg her when the time comes to let you go there.”

Pietje nodded his curly head.

“If I go to Rome, monsieur,” he said, “my mother will accompany me. She has never allowed me to be out of her sight since I was an infant, except for a few hours at a time on such occasions as these when she may go to Brussels, or to Ghent, or to Ostend for the day. But she would be happy in Rome—we have talked much of Rome, she and I, and read many books about it.”

The Marquis again consulted his watch. He

threw away his cigar and rose. "Well," he said, "this has been a very pleasant meeting, friend Pietje, but now I must go: it is nearly train-time, and my servant will be awaiting me at the station. Perhaps you will walk across with me?"

"If it will afford monsieur any pleasure," replied Pietje.

As they left the house, and walked into the sunlit street Monsieur Joseph, pocketing the gold which the Marquis slipped into his hand at the door, gazed after them admiringly, his lips smiling, his head on one side.

"*Par bleu!*" he said to himself. "But what a resemblance! They are as like as two peas in a pod, those. If the Italian lord were beardless, now. . . ."

Left alone on the platform after the Ostend express had steamed away and the waving hand of the Marquis had vanished, Pietje felt a sudden sense of desolation. He glanced at the clock and realised that his mother would not be home for quite four hours. He turned and walked slowly away. Suddenly a horrible recollection struck him. He gasped for breath, smote his hands violently together, and darting out of the station, rushed headlong across the square.

III

PIETJE never stopped running until he found himself half-way down the Rue Sud de Sablon and abreast of the cathedral, upon whose hoary stones the afternoon sun was just then making full play. But it was neither the cathedral nor the sunlight, the old grey stones nor the wonderful architecture, that arrested his headlong flight. Rather it was the windows of a *confiserie*, wherein were set out sufficient stores of bon-bons and sweetstuff to make half a dozen large schools fit practice grounds for the doctors. Pietje paused, inspected, dubitated, considered the merits of this and that, and finally deciding on a sweetmeat which for sweetness and stickiness could not well be beaten, entered and gave a generous order.

"Eh, well, Monsieur Pietje, thou pantest, thou!" remarked the buxom lady behind the counter.

"Yes, Madame. I have been running," answered Pietje, getting his breath,

"That is bad for the lungs. Let the dogs run—young gentlemen like thee should walk sedately. I trust thy good mother is well?"

"I thank you, Madame—yes. My mother is very well."

"As for me, myself," said Madame, "I have the asthma. Were I to run like thee—poof! I should fall as one dead. But I am an old woman, and thou art young. Thanks, Monsieur Pietje, and do not run too fast—some day thou wilt want all the breath thou canst find."

However, when Pietje got outside the shop with his sweetmeat, he began to run faster than ever. He darted round the corner of the cathedral, passed Nôtre Dame, passed his own house without as much as a look at it, and sped on towards the Porte St. Catharine. Save for his neat, clean, and innocent appearance he might have been a criminal flying from justice. And in his heart he felt very criminal indeed. For the first time since he could remember he had broken his word. He had been so fascinated by the Marquis of Albaccina that he had actually forgotten a solemn promise made as recently as nine o'clock that very morning.

Pietje groaned at the thought of it. Yes—he had promised most solemnly to play ball

with the little Adèle at precisely half-past one o'clock. And it was now past three ! What desolation !

The little Adèle lived with a doting papa and mamma in a big house in a big walled garden near the Porte St. Catharine. She was nine years old, and Pietje was her faithful knight. He saw Adèle's china-blue eyes heavy with tears at his defection, and he smote his forehead. At the same time he clutched the sticky sweetmeat more tightly and ran harder.

Pietje burst open the garden door, ran up the neatly gravelled path, and entered the *salon*. He had a free run of that house and did as he liked in it, always in strict keeping with his very polite manners. He pulled himself up short on entering the threshold of the *salon* and made haste to remove his straw hat. Adèle was not there, but her mamma, Madame Regnier, was, and Madame was taking a comfortable siesta after her usual hearty *déjeuner*. A coffee-cup and a *petite verre* stood on a little table at the side of her easy-chair.

Madame Regnier opened one eye, then the other—then she turned both on Pietje. They had been very handsome eyes, those, once, and they were still very keen and bright, and almost

as black as Pietje's big orbs. To him just then they seemed as big as lamps.

"Good-day, Madame Regnier," said Pietje, tremblingly.

Madame Regnier became fully awake and felt at her cap. Then she shook a fat forefinger.

"Ah, bad one!" she said. "Is it thus thou keepest promises? The little Adèle expected thee ages ago."

"I am very sorry, Madame," said Pietje, humbly. "I—I forgot."

"Fie! A gentleman should never forget a promise made to a lady. What is that thou carriest, Pietje?"

"It is a sweetmeat, Madame Regnier."

"Do not give too much of it to the little Adèle. The last time thou didst give her sweetmeats she was ill."

"I will be careful, Madame. But Adèle——?"

"Thou wilt find her in the orchard—doubtless melting in tears. Thy mother is in Brussels to-day, Pietje, is she not?"

"Yes, Madame."

"What energy on so warm a day! But she is, of course, English, which accounts. Well, go find the little Adèle, Pietje, and be good children."

Therewith Madame Regnier, conscious that all was right with the world, that her good husband was at his counting-house, making money, and that the domestic wheels would roll smoothly until dinner-time came round, closed both eyes and went to sleep again, while Pietje slipped through the house and made for the orchard. As he opened the gate he caught a glimpse of Adèle's white frock in the far distance—now that he saw her he walked with slower steps.

The little Adèle sat on a rustic seat beneath a cherry tree, the pink and white blossoms of which fell in showers about her whenever a soft wind blew across the orchard. She was a very pathetic Adèle when Pietje hove in sight, and her small soul felt that she had just cause to be so. She had glued her small nose to the window of the *salon* as soon as *déjeuner* was over ; she had gone down to the garden gate at least a dozen times to peep up the road in search of Pietje, and time had gone, and gone, and gone, and no Pietje had appeared. And so Adèle's heart had come nigh to bursting, and Adèle's pretty under-lip had begun to quiver, and at last Adèle had wandered into the orchard to weep into her pinafore. She was weeping when Pietje found her.

Pietje immediately became inconsolable. He sat down beside her and tried to draw the lace pinafore away from her pink-and-white face.

"Oh, Adèle!" he said. "Thou weepest, Adèle! Oh! it is I who have made thee weep. Do not weep, Adèle!—see, I am here, I, Pietje! And, Adèle, I have brought thee a sweetmeat. Behold, then!"

Adèle, who was well known to her papa as the possessor of a sweet tooth, allowed Pietje to draw away as much of the lace pinafore as would permit one of the china-blue eyes to see the sticky confection. Pietje deftly broke off a corner and slipped it into Adèle's rosebud mouth. Adèle sucked—and sobbed.

"But see thou, Adèle," said Pietje with an ingratiating manner which would have instantly melted a grown woman's heart, "figure to thyself the reason which kept me from thee. A great man, a Marquis, one of the most famous artists living, did me the honour to invite me to *déjeuner* at the Flandre! Was it for me to refuse? But I hastened to thee as soon as he departed. Dost thou find the sweetmeat good, Adèle?"

Adèle found it so good that her mouth readily received the next lump which Pietje slipped into it. But still Adèle sobbed.

"I wish thou would'st not weep, Adèle. It desolates me to see thee weep. Besides, thou wilt have red eyes."

Adèle sobbed afresh at this terrible suggestion. Pietje grew desperate.

"Adèle, if—if thou wilt not weep I will—I will buy thee a doll!"

Adèle put down her pinafore, left the sweetmeat in her cheek, and stared at him.

"But dolls cost money," she said, in an awestruck whisper.

"I have money," said Pietje, proudly. He dug one hand into his trouser pocket and drew out a small pile of silver. "See thou!"

Five minutes later the two children burst into the *salon*.

"Maman—maman!" screamed the little Adèle. "Pietje takes me to buy a doll in the Rue des Pierres. He has money, Pietje. And the doll cries."

"Eh, well, my children!" said Madame, good-natured from sheer drowsiness. "Get not in the way of those tramcars there outside. Hold thou her hand, Pietje, and do not spend too much money on the doll."

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“Madame may depend upon me,” said Pietje with great gallantry.

Madame went to sleep again. Pietje of the pocketful of silver and Adèle of the sticky mouth and golden hair went dancing into the sunlight.

sun-glow—their voices came with the hush of distance. A barge passed along the canal—he heard the water lipping at its broad bows; he heard the bargeman encouraging his horses. Overhead the sails of the old mill whirred steadily along—up, down; up, down; up, down. . . .

What a day this had been! To meet so great a man as the famous Marquis of Albaccina, celebrated all the world over as a great painter, a renowned virtuoso, member of several academies—and to be praised and encouraged by him! Oh, the good fortune of it!—this was indeed a day to be marked with a white stone. And to be told that he should certainly—nay, must certainly—go to Rome, and to have the promise of the great man's patronage and help when he got there—surely it was all a beautiful dream from which he would presently awake to find himself in his bed with the morning sun streaming in at the window and old Ursula knocking at his door. He pinched himself to find out whether he was really awake.

Rome! It had been the dream of his life for years, he said to himself. His eyes grew ecstatic at the thought of it. He had looked at so many pictures of the Eternal City, had studied so many maps and plans of it, that he knew its

aspects, its configuration, its streets, squares, churches, monuments, as intimately as he knew Bruges. Now, as he sat there by the slow-moving waters of the canal, the Flemish landscape faded away, and he saw Italy, warm, languorous, lovely, rise up before him like a mirage. He stood on Monte Pincio and saw the dome of St. Peter's emerge through the opalescent mists that rolled slowly away from the yellow Tiber. He stood between the Scala Santa and the façade of St. John Lateran, and gazing spellbound across the widespread plain beneath saw the long lines of ruined aqueduct which span it. He stood on the Tarpeian Rock and gazed spellbound at the Forum; he strayed into the Colosseum and heard the death-song of the martyrs, the roaring of the lions, the shouting of the human beasts lustful for human blood. He wandered through churches, museums, galleries—he knew already, through much reading, where everything was. He was steeped in Rome—and so he wanted Rome all the more, wanted to feel it, smell it, taste it, absorb it, be absorbed in it. And boy-like he made a vague, wordless resolution as he sat there that he would give his mother no peace until he and she set their faces towards Italy.

"My mother is in excellent health, doctor, thank you. She has gone to buy something in Brussels—I do not know what—which she could not get here in Bruges. But she will return by the evening train. She did not expect you, doctor, did she?"

"No," answered the doctor. "No—she is not expecting me. But there were some business matters on which I wished to see her, and as I wanted a little holiday I thought I would run over for a day or two. My sister sends her love to you, Pietje."

"It is kind," Pietje responded with fervour. "When will Mam'selle make her annual visit to us?—we look forward to it so. Old Ursula spoke of it but yesterday—the room has been ready for weeks."

"Very likely as soon as I return," said Garrendon. "Well, how goes the painting and the sketching, Pietje?"

Pietje put his hands in the pockets of his trousers and rattled what money remained after purchasing the doll.

"Oh, I have improved greatly since you were last in Bruges, doctor," he said. "I have worked hard. Doctor, while you are here, be my friend. Speak for me to my mother—she thinks so much

of your advice that she will listen to anything you say. She always tells me that you are the best and kindest man living—so of course she will do what you tell her to do.”

Dr. Garrendon's face became very grave. He took off his spectacles and wiped them very carefully.

“Yes—what is it, Pietje?” he said, as he replaced them.

“Persuade my mother to let me go to Rome, doctor. Not, of course, just now, but when I have made more progress with my studies under Monsieur Verbeke. I want to study art.”

“I do not think your mother would ever stand in the way, Pietje, of your studying anything. You are sure it is painting, and not music?”

“Oh, I am sure, doctor. Music is my recreation; painting is my career. And see, doctor, I have had a great adventure to-day. I was making a water-colour sketch in the Béguinage and a gentleman spoke to me, admired my work, invited me to *déjeuner* at the Flandre. And fancy who he was, doctor—see, his card!”

Pietje thrust his treasured bit of pasteboard into Dr. Garrendon's hand: his big, bright eyes devoured the man's face as he read it.

“Oh, yes,” said the doctor. “Yes, I know

the Marquis of Albaccina's name. Dear me! That was a very nice experience, Pietje. Is the Marquis staying here in Bruges, then?"

Pietje shook his head sorrowfully.

"Alas, no, doctor!" he answered. "Monsieur the Marquis left by the mail train for Ostend and London. Nor can he return this way towards Rome—he goes from London to Paris, thence to Locarno. But he has promised to write to my mother."

"Well, you have lots of time before you," said Garrendon. "Why, come, you are not yet twelve years old."

"It is true," said Pietje, "but I feel very old indeed. And I would much rather go to Rome than to Antwerp: somehow Antwerp does not sound to me as Rome does. Besides, I want to see the Marquis again."

"We will see what your mother says," said the doctor, diplomatically.

They had turned up one of the side-lanes leading from the canal, and had emerged upon the Grand Place, now beginning to show signs of life. At the doctor's suggestion they sat down outside one of the little *cafés* and drank coffee — Garrendon smoked a cigar and looked about him with the lazy enjoy-

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ment of a hard-worked man who rarely gets a holiday.

"It is a lovely old town, this, Pietje!" he said with a burst of enthusiasm.

"It is true," responded Pietje, solemn as ever.

"It is, truly, very true."

The shadows were falling as they went back to the house of the yellow walls and green shutters and the Angelus was ringing from all the spires and towers. Old Ursula met them on the threshold.

"Madame has returned already," she said.

A door opened. Linda came forward with outstretched hands to greet her old friend.

V

DURING the twelve years which had elapsed since Linda's departure from the old Yorkshire farmstead Garrendon had visited her frequently. Mr. Laidman was getting old and infirm, and though he had been over to Bruges once or twice when Linda first settled down there he was glad to leave as much of her business affairs as he could in the hands of his co-trustee. Garrendon usually came for a few days in spring, and again for a week or two in autumn. He looked forward to these visits during all the rest of the year. And every visit found him more in love with Linda van de Linde than ever. Yet always as he found himself crossing the strip of shining sea which separates the flat coast of Belgium from the great chalk-cliffs of Kent he caught his heart saying over and over again to itself that it would never be any use. Linda was unchangeable.

Seeing her so regularly it was natural that he

saw very little sign of outward change in her. As he made his toilet for dinner on this particular evening he decided, thinking about her and about the twelve vanished years, that in reality she looked very little older than when she had left England. She was now a woman of thirty, and the mother of a big boy of eleven, but her beauty was as fresh and almost as girlish as ever, and enhanced not a little by a certain sweet and grave matronliness which sat well on her. There were few signs of sorrow on her face. When she had first come to Bruges as the young widow Van der Huysen, whose husband had died suddenly in England, she had for a time shown unmistakable signs of care and grief, but all these had gradually died away after the birth of Pietje. It was only now and then, when she was very silent, that her face became wistful when she looked at the boy—at all other times she went about with a sunny countenance and cheery words. She looked like a woman who has conquered something.

So far as material comfort and prosperity were concerned, Linda had reason for gratitude. It was cheap, living there in Bruges. She had a convenient and well-ordered house, a lovely old garden, devoted servants, and as many friends

as she chose to make. She denied herself and Pietje nothing that was reasonable, she was generous to her servants and lavish in her charity, but there was always a considerable balance on the right side of her yearly accounts, and only Dr. Garrendon knew how this was accumulating in good solid English securities. There would never be any need for Pietje to earn his living—he would be a rich man. Old Cornelius van de Linde's fortune was in a fair way to being doubled.

It always seemed to Garrendon when he visited Linda in Bruges that it was very like the well-remembered visits to Morcarstoft. The Flemish house was filled with the furniture which had once filled the old English farmstead. The larger *salon* contained the very things which had once lent dignity and colour to the stone hall; the smaller one, opening out of it, held the grand piano and the old eighteenth-century chairs and tables of the best parlour. In both there was always the scent of the dried rose-leaves and fragrant lavender which had permeated the atmosphere at Morcarstoft. One might close one's eyes, said Garrendon to himself, and fancy oneself back in the old place.

That night after Pietje had gone to bed Linda

and Garrendon sat in the larger *salon*, he smoking a cigar, she busied in sewing some garment intended for the boy. A great aching came into the man's heart—he had loved her long and truly and had hungered to see her sitting by his own fireside. That hunger was as great as ever.

She looked up and met his earnest glance, and looked down at her work again.

"You think I am very quiet," she said.

"Perhaps I did," he answered.

"I was thinking about Pietje's new friend," she said.

"Yes?" said Garrendon. "Yes?"

She pursued her task for some little time before she spoke again.

"I do not think there is any doubt that Pietje will become a great artist," she said softly. Then, after another pause, she added in a still lower tone: "It would be surprising if he were not an artist, wouldn't it?"

Garrendon stirred uneasily in his chair. He did not like Linda to refer to the past. If he could have had his way he would have blotted that past completely out of her recollection.

"I suppose it would," he said. "Yes, I suppose it would."

"Of course," she said. "That is one of the things that goes without saying."

She lifted her face to the light to thread her needle, and Garrendon, watching her closely, saw a queer smile playing about the corners of her mouth. Presently she laughed.

"What is it?" he asked.

"I was reflecting on the undoubted fact that now that master Pietje has met this great man he will give me no peace until I let him go to Rome," she answered. "He has the oddest trick of invariably getting his own way, that boy. He is always obedient, always dutiful, and very tractable, but he always gets there. And he will get to Rome—with me in attendance."

"In some things," remarked Garrendon, "he is very like his mother. He has determination and self-will."

"They are not bad things to possess," she said musingly. "I have found them useful in my time."

Garrendon again stirred uneasily in his chair. She spoke as if her life were already lived. He affected to laugh.

"Your time?" he said. "Why, you are only just beginning to live!"

She shook her head. As she moved it he

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caught the glint of the lamp on her dark hair—glossy and black as ever and just as luxuriant as in her girlish days.

“ Oh, no ! ” she said. “ I’ve lived my life. I only live now for the boy. That’s all. Don’t think, though, that I’m unhappy. I’m not—not a bit unhappy. I might be—if I let myself be. But I don’t let myself be. No—I can truthfully say I’m very happy. It’s been a great deal to see Pietje grow up, to train him, help him, play with him, talk to him. Ah !—there’s nobody knows what a comfort he’s been ! ”

Garrendon threw his cigar away and getting up from his chair began to pace up and down the *salon*. She took no notice of his movements and went on calmly sewing. He stopped at last on the other side of the table at which she was working and looked at her across its width.

“ Listen ! ” he said.

She left her needle sticking in the seam and looked up at him with her old air of candour.

“ Yes ? ” she said.

Garrendon looked at her for a full moment in silence ; her eyes met his steadily.

“ Are you never going to let anything more come into your life ? ” he said. “ Never ? ”

She shook her head and picked up her needle and her work.

"Never!" she said, resolutely. "Never!"

Her mouth shut itself as if the lips would never open again.

Garrendon resumed his restless marching up and down.

"I do not think that is right," he said, a little sadly and a little impatiently.

"No? But then you see, I do," she answered.

"Is it justifiable?" he asked.

"That," she replied, "is a question for me, and me only. I say—yes, it is justifiable."

Garrendon sat down again. He found another cigar and lighted it. "Well," he said, with a sigh, "you know best. But I believe that I could make you happier than you are even now, if you would marry me, Linda."

She shook her head.

"No," she said with decided emphasis. "You could not. And for a simple reason—I have nothing to give you. I have already given you all that I could ever give—esteem, respect, confidence, and a very real and warm affection. I could never—never under any circumstances—give more. And so you could not make me happier than I am. No, if I married you I

should feel most unhappy, because I should know that I was doing a very wicked thing. Besides there is my vow—and it is such a consolation to keep it.”

“Is it right to make such vows?” asked Garrendon.

“I do not know what those competent to judge might say,” she replied. “I feel it to be right in my own case. I gave my life, my everything, to Pietje’s father once and for all—it is therefore right that I keep them for him. They are his—not mine.”

“Until when?” said Garrendon, a little bitterly.

“I said once and for all. You see,” she continued, letting her work fall in her lap, and looking at him with a frank appeal in her eyes, “perhaps even now you do not quite understand. But I love Adrian just as dearly as ever—if he were to come in at that door now the last twelve years would just be blotted out! And it will be like that to the end.”

“And you will go on hoping?”

“For his return? Oh, no!” she answered, with a little smile which was enigmatical to Garrendon. “Oh, no! All that’s over. I used to hope, and hope, and hope the first two

or three years, but as Pietje grew older I began to take a calmer view of things. No—I don't expect ever to see Adrian again in this world."

"You believe him—dead?"

She nodded in silence and bent her head over her work.

"After all," she said presently, "after all, I have Pietje."

Garrendon made no reply to this. He sat smoking silently for some time, watching her strong, supple fingers, listening to the steady, continuous click of the needle. Something in her calm, resolute face called up a sudden flood of great admiration for her.

"Whatever sorrow you have gone through, Linda, has developed a fine character in you!" he said.

She left her needle in her work, and laying her hand on the edge of the table, half-turned and looked at him.

"I am glad to hear you say that," she said. "I know that you would not say anything that you did not feel to be true. Yes—what sorrow I have gone through has done me good—I know it. I was very wilful, very headstrong, very passionate and impulsive as a girl. I like my own way now—you can easily see where Pietje

gets his trick of persistence from !—but I have learnt that one cannot always have one's own way. And learning it has—helped me.”

“In other words,” said Garrendon, “you have learnt resignation and submission—isn't that it?”

“Perhaps. But I don't know. I am not clever, and not good at analysing things,” she answered. “I daresay I do not understand myself. I am a queer bundle of mixtures. I am not what is commonly called religious, yet I have knelt for hours in Nôtre Dame there before Michael Angelo's statue of the Madonna and Child, not praying a word, but just *feeling*. *Feeling*, you know. That was when Pietje was little,” she added reflectively.

“If Pietje eventually goes to study art in Rome,” said Garrendon, reverting to a more debatable subject, “you, I suppose, will go with him?”

Linda laughed.

“As Pietje has always been tied to his mother's apron-strings,” she said, “it goes without saying that I shall. But that will not be just yet—though now that he has got it into his head that he must go nothing will satisfy him and nobody will have any peace until he does go. From

what he says this Marquis of Albaccina seems to have taken a great fancy to him. Do you know his name ? ”

“ I have heard of him certainly,” said Garrendon. “ And I have seen an engraving of a famous picture of his—a scene in Rome in the early morning.”

“ Oh—*April Morning in Rome* ! Yes, Pietje has a copy of that framed in his bedroom. Well, we shall see. But of course he is too young, yet—he must still have many more lessons from Monsieur Verbeke.”

She was silent for a time and presently the needle stopped its rhythmic clicking and the work lay idle on her knees, and Garrendon saw that her eyes, fixed on something far away, grew soft and humid and dark with thought. She caught her breath in a little involuntary sigh and turned to him at last with a smile.

“ See what it is to be a fond and doting mother ! ” she said. “ Ah, if Pietje only proves to have real genius, great talent, and uses it in the right way how proud I shall be—how proud ! ”

“ You will feel it a great recompense,” said Garrendon.

She picked up her sewing again and the needle

flashed in and out of the seam with steady movements.

"I have been recompensed above my deserts already," she said in a low voice. "I have had my boy's love ever since he was a baby, and I know him well enough now to know that I shall always keep it. And sometimes . . . sometimes I see so much of his father in him."

Garrendon left her at ten o'clock, with a promise to call next morning and go with her and Pietje and Monsieur Verbeke on an excursion into the country to a village which they had recently discovered and where one could get an excellent *déjeuner* at a real village hotel. He walked towards the Flandre very slowly, thinking. No, it was no use, he said to himself for the thousandth time—he would never win Linda van de Linde. He knew now that her resolution was irrevocable—she would keep troth with Adrian Darrell, dead or alive, to the very end. The man whom she had known for one short month, who had come so mysteriously into her young life, and had gone with far more mystery out of it, was more real to her now, after twelve years of separation and loneliness than the people with whom she was always in contact. Well—it must be so. He was conscious that

in his highest self his respect for her constancy was heightened and deepened every time he met her.

Left alone Linda finished her work and put away her work-basket. She lighted a candle and went scrupulously round the house—her servants, like all the domestics of Bruges, had already departed to their chambers. She examined all the doors and windows, glanced at the remains of the fire in the kitchen, and finally turned out the lights in the *salon*. Then she went up the wide staircase, the walls of which were ornamented with the old Dutch ware that she had brought over from Morcarstoft. And at the top of the staircase, on a wide landing, she produced a key from her pocket and unlocking the door of a room, entered, and closed the door behind her. No one but herself ever entered that room: she herself entered it every morning and night. It was an exact copy—even to the paint and the paper—of the room which Darrell had occupied at Morcarstoft. Nay, it was no copy, save as to the paper and paint, for every article of furniture which had been in the Morcarstoft room was now in this. There on the chest of drawers were his two suits; there hanging on

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the door were his overcoat and his dressing-gown; there on the dressing-table was his dressing-case. She went over to this and opened it and took out the miniature and looked at it long and earnestly before she kissed it. How like him it was!—and, oh, how like their child—their child!

She left the room at last and went softly along a thickly carpeted corridor to Pietje's bed-chamber, which opened out of a special *sanctum sanctorum* of his own which he allowed nobody to dust or to tidy. She looked at him, shading her candle from his eyes, just as long as she had looked at the miniature. Then she bent over him and kissed his hair, his eyes, his cheek. And Pietje, one brown bare arm thrown carelessly round his curly black head, slept on—dreaming of the Eternal City, calling, calling, calling.

VI

It was Linda's custom to arrange a little *fête* for Dr. Garrendon whenever he came over to Bruges on one of his flying visits, and it usually assumed the shape of an excursion into the country. In these merrymakings Pietje's tutor, Monsieur Verbeke, a very good and worthy old man, was always included, first because he had a great admiration for the English doctor, and secondly because Linda liked to give him a day's outing. On the morning following upon Garrendon's arrival, then, Pietje was despatched to Monsieur Verbeke's *appartement* with instructions to inform the old gentleman that there would be no lessons that day and to bring him back in company with a two-horsed carriage from the posting establishment. Pietje departed upon this mission with a light heart—he was still young enough to understand and appreciate the delights and virtues of an idle day.

Monsieur Verbeke lived round the corner, in

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an ancient house in the Rue de St. Esprit. He had two rooms almost at the top of the building. For some reason which he could not explain Pietje always envied Monsieur Verbeke the possession of these two rooms. They were quite out of the world, so quiet, so peaceful. Looking out of the windows of that which the old tutor used as his sitting-room one saw the great tower of the Cathedral and the quaint roofs and gables of the houses at its feet. Within the room everything was very pleasant. It was evident that Monsieur Verbeke was a student, a bookworm, and a man of taste. Pietje had always determined that when he was a man he would have a room like this of Monsieur Verbeke's. The floor was of polished oak, almost coal-black in hue and shining with much polishing. Its surface was only broken once in all its gleaming expanse—that was before the tiled hearth, where a thick rug was laid for the old gentleman to put his feet upon whenever he sat in his arm-chair to rest or read. The walls were panelled in black oak from floor to ceiling, and were ornamented by paintings of the Renaissance, each of which was an undoubted original. Over the fireplace hung a triptych, which Monsieur Verbeke declared to be the work of Peter Pourbus,

who flourished in the sixteenth century. On each side of the fireplace were bookcases filled entirely with folios and quartos bound in vellum and parchment, products for the most part of the teeming presses of Amsterdam in the time of the Janssons and the Waesburgs. These fine fat volumes, still creamy white and delicate to handle as the smoothest satin, still retaining their old gold or purple strings, still black of type and smelling of dead centuries, fascinated Pietje, who was inclined to be something of a book-lover himself. Scarcely less fascinating was the big bookcase on the other side of the room, facing the hearth, which was filled with leather-bound volumes, ranging from tall folios on the lower shelves to little duodecimos on the top ones. The bindings of the great majority of these books would have excited any bibliophile's envy. They were nearly all in Latin—the only language, in Monsieur Verbeke's opinion, which stood immeasurably superior to all other languages, not even excepting Greek. Their possessor had not only read every one of them, but knew where the appointed place of each was, and could lay his hand upon it at a second's notice. Then on the wall which faced the window there was a fine old Flemish cabinet, in the

drawers of which Monsieur Verbeke treasured a collection of coins and medals which he had been gathering together all his life, and had promised to bequeath to Pietje when he himself was gathered to his fathers and laid in the family vault in St. Jacques, to which parish he belonged. On the top of this brass-clamped cabinet lay Monsieur Verbeke's collection of flutes—he was fond of that instrument, and would sometimes bring one of his favourites to Linda's house of an evening and entertain her and Pietje with melancholy warblings which made their pet poodle, Frillo, howl so dismally that it became necessary to banish him to the kitchen. Between the chest and the windows stood a round table of oak, unclothed and polished highly, like the floor and the panelling. This was always heaped high with books, papers, reviews ; it also afforded space for Monsieur Verbeke's tobacco-jars, his pipes, and his skull-caps, of which he had quite a collection. Between the windows (which were always filled with flowers—tulips in pots being the old man's favourite bloom) and underneath an ancient brass crucifix, was a little table whereat Monsieur Verbeke took his coffee and his roll every morning. That was the only meal he ever had at home—he had a perpetual invitation

to *déjeuner* with Linda and her son ; every evening at seven o'clock to the minute he dined at a particular table in a particular corner of the café-restaurant attached to the Catholic Club in the Rue des Pierres. A very peaceful and contented autumn of life, that of Monsieur Verbeke—yet, as Linda knew, he had known sorrow and tears in his time while it was still springtide with him.

Monsieur Verbeke was taking his coffee when Pietje entered and made his solemn bow. The old gentleman looked up from the book which he held in his left hand and peered at his pupil through his big spectacles with obvious surprise at his presence.

“It is thou, then, Pietje ?” he said. “Is there, then, anything of the unusual ?”

Pietje advanced, his big eyes devouring the big white folios with their golden arabesques and black letterings.

“It is a message from my mother, monsieur,” he said. “There will be no lessons to-day, because Doctor Garrendon has come from England, and we make an excursion into the country. And my mother desires the honour of your company, monsieur.”

“Thy mother has a good heart, and it is a

fine day for making an excursion," said the tutor. "And so monsieur the doctor is once more with us?—that is good hearing—I will finish my last discussion with him, or, at any rate, continue it. And where do we make excursion to, Pietje?"

"It is a long way out in the country, monsieur—beyond Courtrai," answered Pietje. "A little wayside hotel where one can be assured of an excellent *déjeuner*—my mother and I discovered it by accident. The omelettes," he added, reflectively, "are as good as Ursula's."

"That is saying great things. I promise myself a good day. I wonder if one might take one's rod and line?" said Monsieur Verbeke, who was a devotee of the gentle art.

"Indeed, yes, monsieur—there is a fine stream there, and Madame at the hotel told me that I might fish in it whenever I pleased to go again. Let us take our rods, monsieur."

"We shall indeed have a pleasant day," said Monsieur Verbeke, finishing his coffee. He bent his head, crossed himself, and having collected the crumbs from his plate and the tablecloth, rose and opening a window scattered them on the ledge outside. "We will get some bait at Janssons," he continued, turning with a smile

on his old face. "Ah, I have not handled my rod for a month!"

He stood on the hearthrug for a moment, smiling at his own thoughts. He was a little, spare man, under the average height, and he looked of lower stature than he really was because of his scholar's stoop. His features were small and delicately formed, with the exception of his nose, which was large and prominent; his cheeks were rosy as a ripened apple; his mild blue eyes, seen through his big round spectacles, were bright and penetrating. A fringe of grey hair strayed out above his much furrowed forehead from under his silk skull-cap. Pietje, watching him, and wondering what he was smiling at with such obvious pleasure of recollection, thought how very like an old ecclesiastic Monsieur Verbeke was. And in truth there was something of the ecclesiastic about his attire. He wore black knee-breeches and silk stockings; his low, well-polished shoes were fastened by solid silver buckles. His upper garment was more like a cassock than a coat; it had a high collar surrounding a white cravat; its pockets were cut vertically instead of horizontally, and no one ever saw it unbuttoned. The silver-buckled shoes; the silk-stockinged ankles; the cassock-

like coat ; the black silk skull-cap—these things made Monsieur Verbeke look like a highly respectable dignitary of the Church.

Monsieur Verbeke presently came out of his day-dream, nodding his head.

“ Yes,” he said musingly, “ it was a fine pike—it weighed many, many pounds.” Then he remembered the business of the day and beamed upon his pupil. “ I will prepare myself for the excursion,” he said. “ Thy mother and the good doctor will be awaiting us.”

It was a quaint party which set out half an hour later from the yellow house with the green shutters. Pietje had commissioned a roomy landau drawn by two big Flemish horses with long tails ; he himself sat in front with the driver, who in honour of the occasion, and with full knowledge of the fact that this would be as much of a holiday for himself as for his party, had assumed a very tall hat and placed a large nosegay in his breast. Between the driver and Pietje, his inquisitive nose sniffing the oncoming breezes, sat Frillo, whose weekly toilet the dog-barber had made that morning and who wore a blue ribbon tied up in a large bow. Garrendon in his eminently English clothes and stiff billycock hat, sat with his back to the horses smoking

a cigar ; Monsieur Verbeke, similarly equipped from Garrendon's case, leaned comfortably back on the opposite seat, carefully nursing his beloved fishing-rod. By his side, very smart in a new costume which became her dark beauty, sat Linda, proud of Pietje, glad of the company of her friends, happy in giving them a little treat. Garrendon thought that he had never seen her look so handsome—that morning, at any rate, as they bowled along under the tall poplars, the graceful lindens, over the straight, level roads and by the shining canals and dykes that transected the flat landscape, she looked as if she had not a care in the world.

“ Did Pietje tell you of his adventure yesterday, Monsieur Verbeke ? ” she asked when they had cleared the Porte St. Catharine and were advancing towards the open country.

The old tutor bowed his head with an appreciative significance.

“ Indeed, yes, Madame Van der Huysen,” he replied. “ Oh, yes—he told me as we waited for the conveyance. A great event ! But—” here he lowered his voice with an upward glance at the figures of Pietje and Frillo—“ seeing that the stranger was who he was, it was, of course, inevitable that he should recognise the boy's talent.”

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"You think he will become a great artist?" said Garrendon, bending forward.

Monsieur Verbeke screwed up his eyes, pursed his lips, made a little whistling sound, and spread out his hands. It was his way of expressing his belief in the absolutely certain.

"Inevitably, monsieur, inevitably! He is a great artist already. There is no one—no one—here in Bruges who can teach him. I speak, of course, of what he has so far attempted—water-colour landscape," answered Monsieur Verbeke. "He must go—elsewhere."

Linda sighed.

"Yes," she said. "I suppose he will have to go. There always comes a time when the young birds forsake the nest, doesn't there, Monsieur Verbeke?"

"It is a natural law, Madame," said the old man, simply.

Linda sighed again. She glanced at Pietje's black head perched above his white collar. "I wish this great man had not come across him until Pietje was a few years older," she murmured. "He will never rest now until he sees Rome. It will be Rome, Rome, Rome all day long."

Monsieur Verbeke sighed in his turn.

"Truly, Madame, there is a great fascination in Rome—especially when one is young," he said. "It was once my great ambition to visit that greatest of cities—I have never gratified that ambition, and it is now too late."

"Why, you are not as old as all that, Monsieur Verbeke!" said Garrendon. "You could easily undertake a little journey like that—twenty-four hours."

"Oh, I am well enough in health, monsieur, the doctor!—I am, in fact, absurdly healthy. But there are reasons—there are reasons——"

"Look at the water-lilies in that pond!" exclaimed Linda, and began to talk of the country through which they were passing, and of the sunlight and the flowers in the trim gardens and of the carefully cultivated crops on either side the tree-shaded road. She said no more of Pietje, and Monsieur Verbeke was not permitted to grow melancholy.

The little wayside hotel received its guests with open arms and wide-thrown doors. The horses were taken to the stables; the guests to the blue-walled *salon* where pictures of Our Lady, of St. Walburga, of St. Godelive, and of The Sacred Heart, all performed in very striking colours, greeted them from four different points

of view. The *déjeuner* was excellent ; the wine good ; and Frillo had the bones of the cutlets. Monsieur Verbeke's old eyes shone with simple enjoyment, and Garrendon felt as if he were on a holiday for ever.

After they had taken their coffee in the flower-garden Monsieur Verbeke and Pietje could no longer be restrained from fishing. A delightful stream, full of brown pools, ran at the side of the hotel grounds, and the host was gracious enough to tell them to fish to their hearts' content. Pietje went off to fetch the rods, and found Frillo sitting at the feet of the *cocher*, who, confronted by a mighty sausage, a great roll, a round Schiedam cheese, and a capacious stoop of beer was making an *al fresco* repast under the penthouse by the kitchen door. Pietje, who still had money, even after buying the doll which cried, bought him a handful of cigars, and possessing himself of the rods went back to the flower-garden. In ten minutes Monsieur Verbeke and Pietje were sitting fifteen yards apart on the banks of the stream, full of that hope which springs for ever in the hearts of anglers.

Linda and Garrendon watched them from a little harbour. He, looking at her, saw her eyes

fixed on the old tutor with something of the affection which a mother shows to a child, a daughter to a father who is dependent upon her offices.

"You are very fond of Monsieur Verbeke?" he said.

She nodded.

"Yes. For a good reason."

"Yes?"

"He has suffered," she said.

"Most of us have suffered," said Garrendon.

She remained silent for a moment or two, as if she were considering matters.

"Yes," she said at last. "I suppose that is so. But I have a peculiar sympathy for Monsieur Verbeke because he has suffered as—as I have. He told me of it once. It made a bond between us."

Garrendon glanced at the old man. Monsieur Verbeke was absorbed in his fishing. Yet absorbed as he was he contrived to do two things at one time. In his left hand he held up a small octavo; his old lips murmured every word as he perused the ancient pages through the spectacles perched on the bridge of his high, prominent nose. There was little to suggest romance in his figure or attitude: he looked an old, respect-

able scholar, pleasantly engaged. Suffered as she had ? Had Monsieur Verbeke, then, known some love episode ?

"Monsieur Verbeke," said Linda, as if in answer to his unspoken inquiry, "meant to be a priest. It was his ambition."

"It has often struck me," said Garrendon, who was still watching the old man, "that that was exactly what Monsieur Verbeke was intended for. He always looks like an ancient ecclesiastic—say a seminarist."

"Yes—and that is what he should have been. But, as he himself says, it was not to be. His is a disappointed life—a broken life. Yet see how cheerful and happy, even contented he is. He is a wonderful example."

Garrendon made no answer to this. He saw that Linda was thinking deeply of something.

"When Monsieur Verbeke was quite young," she said presently, "he entered one of the seminaries in Brussels—I do not know which order it was. He was looked upon as a very promising candidate for the priesthood—even then he was a great scholar. Everything seemed very promising to him—he came of a good family, and his parents were wealthy people in Bruges there. He made great progress,

and at last he was admitted to the minor orders. It was just after that, ~~when~~ he seemed to stand on the very threshold of his career, the career that he most desired, you know, that the trouble came. I wonder if you can think what caused it ? ”

Garrendon nodded his head.

“ I suppose it was a woman,” he answered.

“ Yes,” she said. “ You are right—it was a woman. Though one would scarcely associate poor Monsieur Verbeke with—love, would one ? Oh, yes, it was a woman—at least, a girl. His own cousin. He cannot speak of her now, after forty years, without emotion. He is a faithful soul—with him it is once and for ever. That is why I have such a respect, such an affection for him.”

“ Because there is a bond, a fellow-feeling between you,” said Garrendon, a little sadly, remembering all she had said to him the previous night.

“ Yes—I suppose that’s it. He loved—deeply. But his love never brought him any happiness, poor little Monsieur Verbeke ! It was when he came back to Bruges for a vacation—one spring. The girl was staying with his parents—a lengthy visit. He was the only child, and the two were

thrown much together. I think he must have been very impressionable in those days—he is very tender-hearted and romantic even now, and writes verses, just as he did then. And—I suppose before he knew what was really happening to him—he fell in love with his cousin and told her of it.”

“And she?”

“She confessed to being in love with him,” replied Linda. “But—oh, well, who knows? Perhaps she was then—I think she was impressionable, as he was. And as he told me himself, with his dear old simplicity, he was then *un beau garçon*, which I can believe—he has such kindly manners and such a heart! But there was the end.”

“The end of what—of his lovemaking or his career?”

“His career. He was too honest to live a lie. He told his father and mother of what had come to him and then he went to the rector of his seminary and told him. ‘It was fortunate for me, Madame, was it not,’ he said, when he told me this life-story of his, ‘that I was not already a priest at that time, for I could not, even had I been a priest, have helped myself from falling in love with my adorable Marguerite, and imagine

what a terrible affair that would have been and what scandal it would have occasioned ! As it was, being only a postulant, I could withdraw from the seminary without offence.' Poor, poor Monsieur Verbeke ! ”

She looked across the garden again with an affectionate glance at the old tutor, who so far had not had a bite, though Pietje had already landed two small fish and made much noise over the fact.

“ And so he came home to Bruges, and the cousins were formally affianced, and the date of marriage fixed, and the girl returned to her parents in Namur to make ready for the wedding, continued Linda. “ ‘ I knew when she was gone that I had been right in doing what I had done, Madame,’ he said, when he told me all this, ‘ for although she was removed from me in body I felt her to be with me in spirit, and I was happy and did not once regret that I had given up my career for her—no, I felt that I was sincere in the step I had taken.’ ”

Pietje landed another fish and uttered another yell of triumph. He held his catch up by its tail, exhibiting it proudly to Monsieur Verbeke.

“ The third, then ! ” he cried. “ You must

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be quick, Monsieur Verbeke, or I shall beat you."

"Patience, patience, my son," said Monsieur Verbeke, calmly. "If one does not catch anything one must practise resignation."

"Patience—resignation—yes, those are Monsieur Verbeke's watch words," murmured Linda. "I think I have learnt them from him—and they are good things to know."

"What happened in Monsieur Verbeke's case?" asked Garrendon.

Linda shook her head.

"Ah!—it was sad, for him! All went well until the time of the marriage was close at hand. The girl must have been deceitful, for he never noticed any alteration in her letters. But when he reached Namur it was to find that she had eloped with another man and had married him. And so the little dream was at an end."

"Why did he not go back to the priesthood?" asked Garrendon.

"No, that was impossible. They wanted him to, but he would not hear of it. 'How could I, Madame?' he said to me. 'Did I not know that every day until I died I should think of her?—yes, every day. You see, it was for ever with me, even though she became

another's. She had such beautiful eyes.' Ah, poor Monsieur Verbeke, he is as much in love with his Marguerite as ever. And I suppose she is now either fat or faded ! ”

“ Linda,” said Garrendon after a pause, “ do you mean all that you said last night—are you going to remain faithful to *his* memory for ever—for *ever* ? ”

She turned and looked at him frankly.

“ Yes,” she answered. “ For ever ! Nothing will ever alter me in that respect. I always considered myself his wife and I shall always be his widow.”

Garrendon sighed.

“ I understand why you admire Monsieur Verbeke so much,” he said.

“ Yes, that's it,” she answered. “ And after all, there's nothing like constancy in either man or woman, is there ? ”

A chuckle of triumph from Monsieur Verbeke made them look up. He had caught a fish—quite a large fish—and Pietje was staring at it with eyes full of envy and covetousness.

VII

It was late in the afternoon when they returned to Bruges, all well content with their excursion. Monsieur Verbeke had caught two more substantial fish and Pietje had been consoled for his tutor's success by landing a fine trout. Garrendon had enjoyed a quiet day in new surroundings, and Linda was pleased because she had given pleasure to her friends. When Monsieur Verbeke in his simple fashion said, "It has been a good day, Madame Van der Huysen," he voiced the feelings of all.

At Linda's door they separated, Garrendon walking on to his hotel, Monsieur Verbeke carrying his three fish home to his cook, and Pietje taking his trout as an offering to Madame Regnier. At seven they were all to meet again for dinner—Monsieur Verbeke promised to bring his best flute with him. A cheery dinner, music, friendly chat would bring the good day to a fitting close.

Linda went into the house alone. In the *entresol* old Ursula met her and pointed a gnarled forefinger to a letter which lay on a side-table.

"For Madame, by the afternoon post," she said.

Linda took the letter into the *salon* and presently sat down to examine it. The handwriting was unfamiliar; the post-mark Dover. The letter had been posted there on the previous evening. Opening it she found its contents to be written on the notepaper of the *Princesse Henriette*, one of the packet-boats which ply between Dover and Ostend. She felt instinctively that the letter was from Pietje's new friend, and she turned to the last page and glanced at the signature. Yes—of course. Certainly the Marquis of Albaccina had lost no time in sending his promised letter to Pietje's mother, she thought.

"He must have taken a great fancy to the boy," she said to herself as she prepared to read the letter carefully.

She was vaguely conscious that she felt some dread of what this letter might suggest to her, that it might lead, directly or indirectly to separation from her son. That Pietje had a career before him she had never doubted since

he was quite a child; that that career might eventually take him from her in, at any rate, some measure, she had foreseen with distrust and pain. He had been so much her all-in-all during those first trying years that he had now come to be her life. She let the letter drop in her lap for a moment and thought, trying to see into the future. But presently, with an impatient jerk of her hand, she picked it up again and read steadily through it.

The letter was in English; there was something characteristically English in the handwriting. So far as Linda's memory could serve her on this point the prevalent style of Italian handwriting was graceful and flowing; that at which she now looked was almost upright, written, evidently, with a thick-pointed pen. There was something sturdy, something British about it—it did not seem to her the writing of an artist. Yet looking more closely at it she saw that many of the letters were formed in a somewhat fanciful fashion and that the upstrokes and downstrokes were if anything unduly elongated.

“Madam,” the letter ran, “your son will no doubt have told you that he and I accidentally made acquaintance in the Béguinage this

morning and afterwards spent some very pleasant hours in each other's company. He will also have told you that I was greatly pleased with his work—I may say more to you, his mother, than I could say to him. I feel that he has undoubted talent, amounting even to genius, and that the promise of these, his early years, will, if due care and attention is given to him, be eventually redeemed by great performance. It was a great pleasure, too, to find such talent combined with such modesty and simplicity—it is an equal pleasure now to assure you that I have never met a boy of his age who attracted me so much or in whom I felt so much interest. That must form my excuse for writing to you.

“I had no wish to unsettle your son—he is still very young and must, of course, give full attention to his studies, of which, I was glad to find out, he is very fond. But learning from him that you have already given your permission that he shall study art I suggested to him that rather than go to Antwerp he should go to Rome, which is, in more senses than one, the true centre of the world of art, as it is of all else. For a boy of his temperament, his particular bent, his imagination and disposition, Rome is the one

city in the world wherein the full bent of his undoubted genius can be fully and properly developed. He needs an atmosphere which only Italy, only Rome, can give. In conversing with him, in studying him, during the short space of time I was in his company, I could not help wondering if he has not Italian blood in his veins—old Roman blood. Certainly he is a plant which should be developed in the Garden of Europe.

“I am sure that you, being his mother, will understand me when I say that environment and atmosphere means everything to such a nature as his. He is now entering upon a most impressionable age; he will be doubly impressionable, because he possesses not only a remarkably acute sense of beauty, but a very vivid sense of imagination. Therefore he should at as early an age as possible be placed amidst surroundings which will help to form and to build up the career which I have no hesitation in predicting for him. In brief, he should be placed in Rome as soon as may be, consistent with your arrangements and with his education. If it would be convenient to you to send him to Rome next year there is no reason why his educational studies should not be completed in

Rome. There are excellent colleges, schools, and private tutors in the city ; he could with ease devote at least half a day to these studies, and, at the same time, occupy the other half in the study of Art. The great, the important thing at this juncture is to surround him, to permeate him, with the life, colour, atmosphere of Italy.

“ I trust you will not—but I am sure that you will not—think me presumptuous if I say that I have a great desire to render your son whatever services I can. I have no children—if I had a son of his promise I should devote myself entirely to the furtherance of his prospects and the perfection of his genius. If you will permit me to do so, it will give me the keenest pleasure to help your boy. I have much influence in Rome, and if he goes there I can promise you that he shall have such advantages as few young artists can obtain. That he will fully justify the confidence I have in him I have no doubt whatever.

“ You will lay me under a debt of obligation, Madame, if you will carefully consider these proposals. Had I been able to do so I would have done myself the honour of calling upon you, but I have an important engagement in London to-night. I am sorry, too, that I cannot

visit Bruges on my way back to Rome ; I stay but a day or two in London ; then go to Paris, and thence to Locarno, before returning to Italy. A little later I go over to the United States for several weeks, and shall return to Europe in September. If you should write to me on the points raised in this letter I shall be at the Grand Hotel, Paris, until May 24 ; the Grand Hotel, Locarno, until June 4 ; after that, until July, Palazzo Albaccina, Rome.

“ But while you are considering this question (which, of course, being one of the first importance and necessitating no doubt many changes in your arrangements, cannot be decided hastily) I should feel it a kindness on your part if you would permit your son to visit me in Rome during the coming autumn, after my return from New York. October is a very pleasant month in Rome—if you will allow him to spend it with me I will give him every care and attention. In this invitation I also wish to include his tutor, the Monsieur Verbeke of whom he spoke very affectionately to me, and who, I understand, has never visited Italy. Both shall have my heartiest welcome. The journey is not fatiguing, nor complicated—a through carriage may be had at Brussels.

" I present my respectful compliments to you, Madame, and my kind remembrances to your son, and I remain,

" Your obedient servant,

" ALBACCINA."

Linda read this letter twice over. After the second reading she realised that her feelings were extremely vague and confused. She was conscious of an immense sensation of maternal pride on the one hand ; she was equally conscious of the sharp pains of maternal jealousy on the other. She wanted Pietje to be a great man, a famous artist—but she did not want his greatness nor his art to take him away from her, and she gripped the arms of her easy-chair a little tigerishly as she thought of such a dreadful eventuality, and the old black frown came between her level brows. But it soon cleared again, and she laughed, with something of light-heartedness.

" After all," she said, " the boy will be a man—and before very long, too. I can't expect him to be my baby for ever. But oh !—he's all I've got—all I've got ! "

She read the concluding paragraphs of the letter again and smiled over them. " Poor

Monsieur Verbeke ! ” she said. “ How pleased and proud he will be to have such attention shown him ! Well, there’s no reason why he and Pietje shouldn’t visit the Marquis in autumn. It will do them both good, and I can get Mary Garrendon to come and stay with me. All the same. . . . ”

She did not finish this in words, but she knew what thought it was that she was voicing. All the same the house would be dull without the boy—she would miss his voice, his presence, his good-night kiss—yes, even for a month.

Going upstairs to make her toilette for her little dinner-party a sudden thought struck her with the force of a revelation—a thought which had never come into her mind before.

Some day Pietje would fall in love !

He would put the—the girl before her, his mother. She would have to take a second place.

The mere thought of this sent the hot blood into her face in one burning rush. She gripped the rail of the staircase and for a moment felt as if some crushing, merciless hand had seized her by the heart. But presently she drew her breath again and went slowly upstairs, smiling.

“ What a sentimental fool I am ! ” she

thought. "Of course he'll fall in love, and marry, and have babies of his own, and I shall be grandmamma, sitting in the corner. Well—I've had my day!"

That evening they were all very happy—Garrendon included, in spite of the hopelessness of his passion for Linda. Monsieur Verbeke, in spite of his simplicity and his studious habits, was something of a *bon vivant*, appreciating well-cooked food and good wine, and on the occasions of these little gatherings he was wont to prove himself an admirable *raconteur*. Then, later on, they had music—Pietje dreamed on his violin, his great black eyes solemnly staring into cavernous depths of fancy, and Monsieur Verbeke performed elegant, if melancholy, *morceaux* on his silver-mounted flute, and Garrendon, who had a really good voice when he cared to use it, was coaxed by Linda into singing some old English ballads, including "John Peel" which had been her father's favourite song, and was much admired by Monsieur Verbeke who considered it very typical of the extraordinary nation across the North Sea.

All this time she had said no word to any of them as to her receipt of the Marquis of Albaccina's letter. But when Pietje, after a

final exchange of badinage with his tutor as to the merits of their respective catches of fish, had retired to his usual sound slumbers she mentioned the matter to her two friends, who were also her trusted counsellors. But first she installed them in easy-chairs on either side of the fire, placed the cigars within Garrendon's reach, and filled Monsieur Verbeke's big pipe for him with her own hands, and saw that they were both supplied with a comfortable drink. These hospitalities attended to, she sat down between them and drew out the letter.

"I have been waiting until Pietje's departure to give you some news," she said. "I have had a letter from the Marquis of Albaccina."

"So soon?" said Garrendon.

"It was written on the boat between Ostend and Dover," she replied, "and posted at Dover last night, so it would come over by this morning's packet. It is a very kind letter. And there is something about you, Monsieur Verbeke, in it—you cannot guess what."

Monsieur Verbeke looked his astonishment.

"Indeed, no, Madame! What should a great nobleman have to say of a poor thing like me? But I suppose our Pietje has been telling him that I teach him Latin and mathematics."

“ Well, you shall hear what Monsieur the Marquis has to say of you. I will read the letter aloud. I did not wish Pietje to know of its arrival until I had consulted you and Monsieur Garrendon. It is in English, Monsieur Verbeke—shall I read it in the original, or translate it for you into French ? ”

During her twelve years of residence in Bruges, Linda had made it the chief business of her life (next to the care of Pietje) never to be idle, and she had spent much time in perfecting herself in French, with the result that she now spoke that language like a native. She had learnt the popular vernacular of Bruges also—that Flemish which is in reality a dialect form of the Low-Dutch group of the West-German tongue—chiefly because it was the language of the market people and the surrounding peasantry. As for Monsieur Verbeke he had taught himself English in his old age, very largely by his intercourse with Linda and Pietje and had progressed so well that he now read many English books and reviews.

“ Thanks, Madame,” he said, “ but I would much rather hear Monsieur the Marquis’s letter in the original, admirably as you would translate it. If there comes a word that I do not comprehend——”

"Yes, tell me," said Linda. "Listen then, both."

The two men kept silence until she came to the concluding paragraphs of the letter. At the reference to himself Monsieur Verbeke made a little clucking sound in his throat and throwing his head back stared hard at the ceiling. Then he bent his head, shading his eyes with his hand and remained very quiet until Linda had finished reading the letter.

"There!" she said. "What do you think of that, my friends?"

"I think it a remarkably kind letter," said Garrendon. "That its writer has been greatly struck by Pietje there can be no doubt. What a queer world it is! That accidental meetings may lead to—who knows what?"

"If it is that there are such things as accidents," said Monsieur Verbeke in a low tone. "It is, indeed, as the good doctor says, a very kind letter, Madame Van der Huysen, and does credit to the writer's heart. Oh, our Pietje will, without doubt, justify all we hope of him."

"And you, Monsieur Verbeke—what do you say of the Marquis's invitation to yourself?"

"Ah, Madame!" answered Monsieur Verbeke with a smile of gratification, "It is very kind and gracious of so great a man to invite me to

be his guest, but I am getting an old fellow to go paying visits. Why, I shall be sixty-five years old on the vigil of Saints Peter and Paul, and that, to be sure, is but a short month away from us ! ”

“ But you are youthful as things go nowadays, Monsieur Verbeke,” said Garrendon. “ And, moreover, you are a very healthy man. I can assure you, from a professional point of view, that you are as strong and healthy as most men of forty-five. You have lived such a very regular life, you see.”

“ Oh, Monsieur Verbeke is quite a boy yet ! ” said Linda. “ You know you are, Monsieur Verbeke, and you like to be told you are—you are very vain.”

Monsieur Verbeke’s apple-red cheeks wrinkled themselves into smiles, and his mild blue eyes beamed and twinkled. He took his glass of Schnapps from the little table at his elbow and sipped thoughtfully at its contents.

“ Ah, but I am an old fellow, an old fellow ! ” he said. “ They would laugh at an old man like me jaunting about like a boy—‘ he is more fit for his bed and his broth,’ they would say. And in a palace, too !—truly, Madame, I should be frightened. A palace ! ”

“ But Monsieur Verbeke, you are not unfamiliar with palaces. Do you not occasionally dine with the bishop, over the street there, in his palace ? ”

“ Oh, indeed, yes, Madame—his lordship is gracious enough to invite me to his table some four or five times in the year, but then the bishop, you see, well, the bishop is an ecclesiastic, and—and we were seminarists together, a long time ago. Ah, yes, yes—that is different. But this great Italian nobleman——”

“ Pooh ! ” said Linda. “ You are as great as he is in your way, Monsieur Verbeke. Are you not one of the first Latinists in Europe ?—everybody knows that. Monsieur Verbeke, you are going to Rome—it has been one of your dreams. Hasn’t it, now ? ”

“ Of a truth, Madame Van der Huysen, you speak with knowledge. Yes, I have always had a longing to see the Eternal City. There is a certain spot there where I would like to say my prayers once before I die ”—and he repeated as if to himself these words : *Sacrosancta Lateranensis Ecclesia, omnium Urbis et Orbis ecclesiarum mater et caput*—“ but really a journey like that, at my time of life. . . . ”

“ Oh, Monsieur Verbeke, your time of life

indeed! You will live to be ninety—perhaps a hundred. Come, Pietje shall go if you will go with him.”

“Oh, Madame, but that is compelling me! We will see—we will consider.”

“Well, consider and see, then. All the same, you must go. It will be your great holiday.”

“Certainly,” said Monsieur Verbeke reflectively, “it is many years since I went further than Blankenberghe or Ostend. And I do not greatly care for either.”

When they parted that night Garrendon asked Linda to lend him the Marquis of Albaccina’s letter. He wanted, he said, to read carefully what this new friend of Pietje’s had to say as regards the boy’s talent.

VIII

ONCE in his own room at the hotel Garrendon sat down to read the letter which Linda had handed to him ten minutes previously. Drawing the envelope from his breast pocket and glancing at the address he became suddenly conscious of a vague feeling of recollection. He looked at the handwriting on the envelope for a long time, his forehead working itself into knots in the effort to bring back some memory. Gradually he became assured that he had somewhere seen that handwriting—but a long time before. It was familiar, in the way in which things that have been lost to sight and even to recollection become familiar when they are once more encountered—familiar with a difference which seems to accentuate the familiarity. But, summoning his mental energies as he might, he found himself unable to remember where he had seen letters formed by that hand. Perhaps it was some trick of his brain—yet there was

the strange familiarity. He felt as one feels who, looking through some long unopened chest, lights on an object once well known but quite forgotten, yet well known as ever when once again brought to light.

He spread the letter out before him on his table—now the familiarity in the handwriting was greater than ever. The two or three lines on the envelope were not so provocative of recollection as the closely written sheet. Once more he set his brain to work in the effort to remember where he had seen that handwriting before, and when. When?—on what occasion?

Suddenly his memory did its work—remembrance came back with a leap into the clear light. He smote the letter with his open palm.

“That’s it!” he exclaimed. “That’s it!” And he hurriedly felt for an old pocket-book, a shabby, much worn old thing which he always carried about him, had carried ever since his mother had given it to him, a school-boy. It was bursting with papers, and roughly tied up with a bit of black ribbon—his fingers trembled a little as he untied this and turned to one particular compartment of the old book. While he searched amongst the papers which it contained his mind went back twelve years.

During the period of Adrian Darrell's stay at Morcarstoft, Garrendon, who was an enthusiastic collector of old furniture, old china, and old pictures, had come across what he was inclined to believe a genuine Morland. He had discovered it in an out-of-the-way farmstead which contained many quaint things of bygone ages, and after exercising due caution in negotiating its sale with the old woman who owned it, had secured it as payment for his professional services. Meeting Darrell on the high road one day he had described it to him, and that afternoon had sent it down to Morcarstoft in order that the artist might examine it. Darrell had returned the picture with a long letter, in which he gave his opinion as to its authenticity and added some interesting comments on the influence of the Dutch school on Morland's art. That letter Garrendon had carefully preserved in his old pocket-book; it was the only document in Darrell's handwriting which any of the people who knew him at Morcarstoft had seen. It struck Garrendon now, as he searched for it, that it was strange he had never thought of showing it to Linda. But he reminded himself that its mere exhibition to her could have served no purpose.

He found the letter at last, somewhat yellow and frayed, and spread it out beside the other. It was not necessary to have an expert knowledge of caligraphy to see the extraordinary similarity of the handwriting in both. Certain peculiarities in one were accurately reproduced in the other; in each the long upstrokes and downstrokes were particularly noticeable. Garrendon at last lifted his head from examining the letters, convinced in his own mind that they were written by the same hand.

He rose from his chair in great agitation, and began to pace the room, trying to realise what this really meant. Could it be possible that Adrian Darrell and the Marquis of Albaccina were—identical? And if so—what would happen when Linda discovered the truth?

He examined the two letters again—examined them with greater care and with more attention to detail. In the end he felt more assured than ever that they were written by the same hand. He noticed also two peculiarities which had at first escaped him. The signature in each letter was underscored by a heavy stroke of the pen which, commencing in a bold straight line on the left hand, became gradually rounded to a curve as it sloped upward to the right. Then

there was a similarity in the mode of address on the envelopes in which these letters had been enclosed. His own was addressed "*To* Dr. Garrendon"; Linda's "*To* Madame van der Huysen." Such a mode of address was, to say the least of it, so sufficiently unusual as to make it noticeable. Decidedly, he said to himself, these letters had been written by the same hand. And that being so the Marquis of Albaccina must be Adrian Darrell.

What would happen, he asked himself, if this man and Linda met? And meet they certainly would. Garrendon knew well that now that the idea had been planted in his mind Pietje would never rest until his mother settled down in Rome: in Rome she and the Marquis would inevitably meet. And then—but there he found himself unable even to predicate what would happen.

He lay awake most of the night wondering if he ought to tell Linda of his discovery. As dawn broke it suddenly occurred to him that he could solve the mystery for himself. It was his intention to return to England that day—he would stay a day or so in London before journeying north, and would seek out the Marquis of Albaccina. Whatever alteration twelve years

might have made in him, he would know Adrian Darrell if he saw him again.

Next morning, when Monsieur Joseph brought him his coffee, he said to that amiable person :

" You had the Marquis of Albaccina here the other day ? "

Monsieur Joseph bowed.

" Certainly, monsieur. Monsieur the Marquis was here, though, but for a very brief visit. One night only."

" A very handsome man, I believe, the Marquis ? " said Garrendon.

" Indeed, yes, monsieur. If monsieur had arrived here earlier in the day on Tuesday he would have seen a striking sight—oh, a very striking sight ! "

" Indeed ? " said Garrendon.

" Yes, monsieur. Monsieur the Marquis brought in with him to *déjeuner* the young Monsieur Van der Huysen, who, of course, has often been here with monsieur himself."

" Oh, yes," said Garrendon. " Monsieur Pietje."

" Monsieur Pietje, of a certainty, Monsieur the doctor. *Par bleu !* saving the Marquis's beard and moustachios, what an extraordinary resemblance between those two ! Many of us

remarked it, monsieur, as the two sat out there in the garden over their coffee. Monsieur Pietje, however, is much darker than the Marquis; monsieur knows what black eyes and hair he has. The Marquis is not so dark. But in features!—eh, well, monsieur, they are as like as two peas.”

“You have had the Marquis here at the Flandre before, I suppose?” asked Garrendon, throwing out his net at random.

“Some years ago, monsieur. Oh, yes—that time for just a brief stay like this; arriving, monsieur understands, late one evening, and journeying onward to England the next day. On that occasion Madame the Marchioness was with the Marquis.”

“Madame the Marchioness!” exclaimed Garrendon involuntarily.

“Yes, monsieur—a very pretty woman. English, I think, monsieur, having hair of the colour of gold and dark blue eyes. Madame was greatly admired, and very gracious in manner. It seemed to me, Monsieur the doctor, that they had just been married”

“And how long since is this?” inquired Garrendon.

Monsieur Joseph considered matters.

"Eh, well, monsieur, it must be some ten years ago, that," he answered. "Yes, quite ten years."

"You are aware, I suppose, that the Marquis of Albaccina is a famous painter?" said Garrendon.

"Oh, truly, yes, monsieur. I have had the pleasure of seeing his work, both in Brussels and in Paris. Oh, a great artist indeed, monsieur. And a most affable and liberal gentleman," added Monsieur Joseph with fervour, remembering the quality of the Marquis's *largesse*, and regretting that he had not made a longer stay. "And they say a very rich man and a great patron of all the arts."

Married! If Linda came to find that out! And that she would find it out was certain—just as certain as Garrendon was now certain that the Marquis of Albaccina was Adrian Darrell. A wild hope sprang into his heart—*when* she found out the truth would she turn to him? He wondered, he hoped—but he doubted. Linda van de Linde, as he knew her, was not the woman to change because of change.

"I won't tell her," he said to himself as he walked slowly towards Linda's house that morning. "I will try to find him first, at any

rate. It will perhaps be best to let things take their course. If I told her of my suspicions it would probably unsettle her."

He found the little household in a state of great excitement. Linda, over their morning coffee, had told Pietje of his new friend's letter, and had given her formal consent to his visit to Rome, provided that Monsieur Verbeke would accompany him. Pietje had immediately flown to his tutor's *appartement* and had coaxed Monsieur Verbeke into giving his consent. He was now dancing about the house with a mad impatience to see the Marquis's letter and to get his mother to write a reply to it. The only cloud in his sky of happiness was brought there by the reflection that he would have to wait five long weary months before setting out on that eventful journey.

"But the joys of anticipation are great," said Garrendon.

"Pietje," said Pietje's mother, "is like the old-fashioned Methodists at home—he believes in present blessings."

"It is a long time, five months," said Pietje.

"You must work hard—then the time will soon pass," counselled Garrendon.

Pietje nodded.

"Oh, yes!" he said. "Monsieur Verbeke and I, we are going to learn Italian. We go to buy the books this very morning. Monsieur Verbeke is very fond of languages, and so am I. We shall be able to speak fluently in Italian when October comes round."

Garrendon left Bruges that afternoon, promising Linda that his sister should defer her annual visit until the autumn, so that she would be company for her during Pietje's absence. Linda walked to the station with him and thought him strangely silent. Until the last moment he was wondering whether or not to tell her of what was in his mind. The train carried him away, still undecided. He could write to her, at any rate, he told himself, when he had found the Marquis of Albaccina in London and had satisfied his suspicions as to that nobleman's identity. And yet he felt a very miserable perplexity as to the proper course to pursue supposing he did find out that those suspicions were correct. For he could not forget two most important things—first, Linda's candid declaration of her unabated affection and passion for the man she had known as Adrian Darrell; secondly, that the man whom he, Garrendon, really believed he should identify as Adrian Darrell, was according to the waiter

at the Hotel de Flandre, married to another woman. It was a position in which he did not care to be placed, which had many features that were objectionable to him. He was sincerely anxious to spare Linda any further pain and trouble, but he knew that it was now impossible to prevent a meeting between Pietje's suddenly discovered patron and herself—sooner or later it was bound to happen. And if the Marquis of Albaccina thus met, was recognised by Linda as her old lover, the father of her child, why, then. . . .

But Garrendon scarcely dared to think of what would happen in such an event. He feared for Linda—he knew her intense devotion to the memory of this ill-fated love; if she discovered, and discovered suddenly, that the man had so far forgotten her as to marry another, the blow would be a terrible one. But he knew quite well that she would take it in silence—her pride was as great as her passion.

His journey to London was empty of result. He soon found that the Marquis of Albaccina had put up at Claridge's, had spent two nights and one day in town, and had left that morning for Paris.

Garrendon wondered as he journeyed home,

ward if he should tell his sister of his doubts and fears. In the end he determined to keep his own counsel. In these matters, he said, human interference was of little use; it must be left to the Supreme Weaver to weave the web in the inevitable way.

IX

MARY GARRENDON, going over for her annual visit to Bruges in the third week of September that year, found the Van der Huysen establishment in as much confusion as if it were about to be broken up for ever. During the summer months Pietje, having a definite object in view which was certain of ultimate attainment, had been kept quiet by indulgence in the sweet things of anticipation, and by a strict attention to the study of Italian. But when September had once set in, and the all-important journey was within measurable distance he began to wax exceedingly impatient, and had soon communicated something of his impatience to his mother and his tutor. Truth to tell, Monsieur Verbeke was almost—perhaps quite, though in a more sedate fashion—as eager to make this wonderful, if brief, journey as Pietje himself was. He had dreamed much of the Eternal City, and of late years had schooled himself

to an acquiescence in the conviction that he was now much too old to see it—now that he was in the way of seeing it he became nervous lest anything should occur to prevent him at the final moment from setting out on this, his last and most notable earthly pilgrimage. Once during that summer he caught a chill, through sitting on a damp stone on the side of a little stream from which he wished to draw certain fine roach, and for some days was miserably anxious as to his recovery: he thought, in his piety and devotion, that he had perhaps dwelt too much on the anticipated pleasure, and that God had afflicted him with this bad cold as a reminder that he must not think too much of worldly things. And for quite ten days he read nothing but the Holy Scriptures and the “Lives of the Saints,” and not only refused to do any Italian with his pupil (who happened just then to be as full of energy as he well could be) but steadfastly declined to talk about Rome, saying that old fellows like himself should meditate hourly upon that longer journey which they would take last of all, whether they liked it or not. But recovering from his chill, and being refreshed by a dosing of very good old port which Linda insisted on presenting him with

in his convalescence, Monsieur Verbeke imitated the example of the devil and was not so much of a saint well as he had been ill. His worldliness, however, took no worse form than a renewed application to the Italian grammar and vocabulary, and a poring over maps and charts of Italy and its cities, in which pursuit he was ably seconded by his pupil.

But with September Pietje entered upon a stage of restlessness which quickly assumed wide dimensions. Possessing a comfortable share of the linguistic faculty he had speedily made himself master of a very passable knowledge of Italian, and had left his tutor far behind in this accomplishment through having unearthed a swarthy skinned Roman who had somehow drifted to Bruges to shave chins and trim hair and was only too willing to talk and to explain for hours together so long as his weekly income was supplemented by a few francs. With formal lessons Pietje would have nothing to do after September came—his violin lay on its shelf neglected: he rarely picked up brush or pencil; all his time was spent in studying the maps of Germany, Switzerland, and Italy, or in considering the time-tables, or in hanging about the Roman tonsorial artist, or in retailing

that worthy's accounts of the Eternal City to the little Adèle, who came in due course to have more fantastic and marvellous dreams of Rome than poets have of an imaginary Paradise.

"Never mind!" said Linda. "He will be just as anxious to come home again to his mother."

She herself had been too busy to share Pietje's impatience. Having the singularly British instincts of the moneyed woman who, possessing handsome children, insists on their being fittingly attired, she had determined to send Pietje on his first visit with a proper equipment. So there had been consignments of new garments, and new linen, and new all sorts of things from London—for she was as particular about coating and trousering and booting the boy as she was about gowning herself, which is saying not a little, she being not devoid of a good deal of woman's vanity and love of pretty things—and Mary Garrendon, arriving about the time that their purple and fine linen arrived, found herself pressed into service as a sort of assistant wardrobe woman. She and Linda were up to their knees in buttons and tapes and bottles of marking-ink when the fond mother made the foregoing remark.

"I wonder if he will," said Mary musingly.

Linda regarded her spinster friend almost vindictively.

"Why, of course!" she said. "It would be strange if he were not glad to come home."

Mary stitched on another button before she replied:

"After all, Bruges is not Rome, you know, Linda," she said at last.

Linda, who was marking handkerchiefs, let her hot iron bump on the table. She turned a face which had suddenly grown anxious on her old friend.

"You—you don't mean that this visit will make him—discontented, unsettled, do you, Mary?" she asked. "Do you, really—do you?"

Mary Garrendon considered her button with a side-ways look.

"I think it would be rather strange—and just a little bit exceptional—if it didn't," she answered.

Linda sat down in the nearest chair, looking very unhappy.

"But he's seen London," she said lamely.

"London," observed Mary, "is not Rome. I think Pietje had not dreamed many dreams of London, had he?"

Linda returned to her handkerchiefs.

"You make me very unhappy," she said. "If I thought. . . ."

She paused and made no sign of proceeding.

"If you thought that Pietje would be dissatisfied with the old surroundings because of making acquaintance with the new, you wouldn't let him go, eh, Linda?"

"Oh, yes, I would let him go," replied Linda. "He's got to go, of course. But—you see," she burst out in her characteristically impetuous fashion, "Pietje must never forget me. I'm his mother. And he's my all—I've nothing else."

"Some day," said Mary, "Pietje will be a man. That some day will come rather quickly, too—in his case."

"Well—well? Now you frighten me more than ever!" exclaimed Linda. "What do you mean?"

"Men don't love as women do, Linda—especially women of your passionate and generous temperament. I haven't any particular admiration for Byron's poetry, but I don't think his lordship was very far out when he uttered such an obvious platitude as that man's love is of man's life a thing apart, nor the equally obvious

one that love is woman's whole existence. With women like you it's the love that loves always, isn't it ? ”

“ That,” said Linda, with a certain disdainful loftiness, “ is the only love there is—the only real love.”

“ It's the only love that brings a terrible amount of pain,” said Mary. “ Now, be sensible. Do you think you're going to make Pietje your petted baby for ever and ever ? ”

“ I never let Pietje be a petted baby ! ” cried Linda. “ Any one who says—or thinks—I have is cruelly unjust. I have always tried to make him a little man. I hate effeminate boys—he isn't one.”

“ Did I say he was ? No—but some day Pietje will fall in love. You will not be first then, you know. It wouldn't be natural that you should be.”

“ I should not expect to be first,” replied Linda. “ Nor second, nor third—nor anything but what I am. I am his mother.”

Then, after a pause, during which each woman continued her work in silence, she said, quite gaily :

“ After all, why alarm oneself ? Pietje's quite a child—not twelve years old, though he's

so tall and strong. It will be quite an age before such a thing could be thought of. And if his visit to Rome makes Bruges distasteful, why, I must go and live in Rome—that's certain."

She sat down again, staring at the handkerchief on which she had just marked Pietje's name.

"A whole month!" she said softly. "Just fancy, Mary, to have him away from me a whole month—to miss his voice, his footstep, his laughter, his violin. Oh! I begin almost to hate this Marquis!"

A sudden thought flashed into her mind. She turned and looked wistfully at Mary Garrendon.

"I wonder why Pietje wants so to go, and why I so don't want to let him go?" she said.

"That," replied Mary, "is because Pietje is going to be a man."

X

PIETJE had gone, and Pietje's mother was very miserable. She was brave and gay enough until the train had carried Monsieur Verbeke and the boy out of sight. When she had caught her last glimpse of the old face and the young one, both unusually juvenile with excitement and anticipation, she heaved a great sigh and turned to Mary Garrendon with an uncertain smile about her lips and very certain tears in her eyes.

"I feel like a hen that has brought off a sitting of ducks, and sees her charges take to water!" she said. "Quite non-plussed and unable to understand things. And I don't want to go home—yet."

Mary suggested that they should go for a walk and mentioned her own desire to see the Béguinage again. Linda shrugged her shoulders impatiently.

"I don't want to go to the Béguinage," she said. "It will remind me so of Pietje."

"So will everything in Bruges," said Mary.

"That," remarked Linda, "is the worst of it. So perhaps we may as well go home. There is a lot of tidying up to be done."

Mary Garrendon foresaw that she was going to witness a manifestation of restlessness on her friend's part. For the first thirty hours after the departure of Monsieur Verbeke and his pupil Linda spent every moment in audibly speculating upon the arrival of the next of the various telegrams which she had charged the travellers to despatch *en route*. She was so anxious to know that they had left the Alps behind them; that they had exchanged the ice and snow of Switzerland for the mellow warmth of Lombardy; that they were safe within the Eternal City itself. At last Mary began to tease her.

"Really, Linda," she said, "you are like a hen with one chicken—to vary your own simile of yesterday."

"I think a hen with one chicken has exactly the same feelings that the hen with many chickens has," Linda replied. "It's you who don't understand, Mary. Once I didn't. You remember little Mrs. Willoughby in the old days——"

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"Who had—was it ten of them?" interrupted Mary.

"Eleven," said Linda. "Well, I was once in Doncaster station. I was quite a girl then, and I saw her seeing her eldest boy—he was about Pietje's age—off to school, somewhere near London. The boy was with some other boys, and of course he wouldn't have shown anything for worlds. You know how ashamed of emotion boys are. And she, of course, wouldn't show anything while they waited for the train to start, but laughed and chatted to him and the other boys, and was as jolly as she could be. But when the train had gone, and she'd waved her handkerchief as long as she could, she turned round and went quickly away, and I saw that her eyes were filled with the biggest tears, and that she was just going to have a real burst as soon as she got into her carriage. And I thought then—how can the loss of just one of them make such a difference when she's ten more, all at home, and most of them dear little babies in the nursery? But I know now," she concluded. "Oh, I know quite well. Mothers should never be robbed of their children; it's not natural."

Having become quite accustomed to these opinions Mary Garrendon was by no means

astonished when Linda, within a week of Pietje's departure, suddenly announced her intention of carrying her friend off to Italy.

"Why shouldn't we go, Mary?" she said. "I can afford it, and Ursula will take great care of the house. Come with me at any rate for a month or two—perhaps Pietje and I may stay until spring. I am tired of our winters here—I want to see the Italian skies."

But Mary knew that what she really wanted was the boy on whom she now lavished the love which she had once poured out in one wild burst upon the boy's father.

END OF PART TWO

PART THREE

THE GOLDEN KEY

I

At seven o'clock that morning, the morning of her first day in Rome, Linda Van de Linde found herself standing in the Piazza di Spagna, gazing with wide-open eyes and childish delight at the already wide-awake life of the great city. The train, swift and direct as it was supposed to be, had crawled lamentably on the previous evening; it had been well past midnight before its weary wheels came to a grinding halt in the big, electric-lighted station which forms so strange a gateway to the mother of cities, and a good hour after that before Linda and Mary Garrendon had got safely settled down in their hotel. And once in bed Linda could not sleep. Always of an active and inquiring turn of mind she could not forget that Rome, the Eternal, the Mysterious, the Imperial, was around her. Half asleep in the train just before midnight she had heard some fellow-passenger say, "We shall soon be within

the walls now," and she had sat up with a sudden leaping of her heart, a sudden quickening of her pulses, to realise that she was really at last at the very gates of this marvellous world-centre, which even then, when she was about to enter it, seemed more of an unrealisable dream than ever. Then she had been conscious of a vast station, brilliantly lighted ; of a great board, such as one may see in all the stations in the world, with its one word painted in bold, staring characters, ROMA ; of a crowd of porters officials, policemen, of many coloured uniforms, of hurryings here, scurryings there ; of a perfect babel of tongues, Italian, French, German, English, American ; of much searching for trunks and portmanteaux ; of great anxiety on the part of Mary Garrendon lest they and their property should be alike lost ; of getting into the hotel omnibus, which at the exact moment seemed to turn up just when and where it was wanted ; of rattling away across a big brilliantly lighted square through which electric trams were threading a swift way ; of descending a long, wide street which looked very new ; of a big hotel, very modern ; of a very modern bedroom in it—of a general sense that for all one saw within one's first half-hour

of electric lights, electric trams, electric bells, electric everything, one might be just as well in London, or Paris, or New York as in the Eternal City. But she was conscious, too, that the real Rome was there. The modern spirit had laid its finger upon the face of the old things, but the heart of the unchangeable was sound, untouched. All through the early hours of the morning she lay awake thinking of all that she had read and heard of this mystery of the world and feeling its call to her, its influence upon her. There was something in its atmosphere, even in a hotel bedroom, which appealed to her, dominated her. She remembered, as she lay there, how, when she first went to Bruges, life-broken, she had lain awake at night and listened to the carillon of the old Belfry, and afterwards, when Pietje was as pink and rosy as he was black and bronzed now, how she, watching him at night as he slept, had heard those chimes again with a new meaning in them. Some such ringing was in her ears now, but of a vaster nature. This was the voice of dominion and power—no sweet, cradle strain this, sending its simple, silvery notes over the quaint gables and lace-like spires of the old Flemish city, but a music of majesty

and empire—the call of Rome the Eternal. And when the crisp October morning came, golden and glad, she rose and bathed and dressed, and, young enough yet to care nothing for the loss of a night's sleep, went out into the streets, eager to hear and to see.

She had gone whither she liked, aimlessly, turning down one street and up another, staring at this and that, daring sometimes to lift the great leather curtains which hung before the doorways of the churches, venturing sometimes to go a tiny way into the churches themselves, to find a little group of reverent figures about some dimly lighted altar or shrine, or to marvel at the paintings and the statuary, and at last she had emerged upon the Piazza di Spagna just as that much-frequented centre was reassuming its ordinary workaday aspect. It was a sunny morning and the sun made smiles all over the houses, the shops, the hotels; on the somewhat gloomy bulk of the great Collegio di Propaganda Fide at the south end of the open space and on the façade of S. Trinita dei Monti towering high above the hundred and twenty-five steps by which it is reached from the Piazza. Linda, crossing the square and gazing about her, felt that she must climb that

fascinating stairway and look down from its summit upon the scene below. There were already flower girls in picturesque greens and red and yellows and whites chattering and laughing on the lower steps of the Scala and about the fountain at its foot; seated on the pediment of the fountain, obviously resting, was a countryman, wearing sandals, whose legs were swathed, whose costume was half-brigandish, half-civilised, whose eyes, apathetic and listless, looked out across the Piazza from beneath a wide-brimmed, conical crowned hat. The tinkle of the fountain mingled with the laughter and chatter of the girls, bunching their wares together. Over all the sun grew warmer.

Linda climbed slowly to the head of the stairs to find herself at last in front of S. Trinita del Monti, that historic church, built by one king of France only to be plundered by French rebels and to be restored to its former dignity by another French sovereign, on whose steps at all times of the day the beggars of Rome love to congregate. Pausing here to get her breath Linda looked to left and right; on the left she saw the long vista of the Via Sistina with its tall houses fading away in the distance as the

street ran into the Via Delle Quattro Fontane and towards the great church of S. Maria Maggiore. That was all houses, she said, and she glanced to the right and saw trees and flowers. And not knowing that she was treading in the footsteps of the long dead and gone, who in their day had followed that very path towards the palace and gardens of Lucullus, she went up the gently ascending road beneath the overhanging gardens of the Villa Medici and came out at last upon the terrace on Monte Pincio which overlooks the Piazza del Popolo. Then, as one spellbound she stood—to see Rome the Majestic rising out of the purple morning mists.

The widespread Piazza beneath her, scene of many a stirring incident in the life of Rome old and new, was as yet scarce awakened to the business of the day. It lay stretched out in the morning sunlight like a live thing—some live thing that sought to suck into itself all the warmth and geniality of the skies. From the open mouths of the four great lionesses couched at the foot of the obelisk which Augustus caused to be brought from Heliopolis rushed great spouts of water which caught the rays of the sun and were transformed into scintillating shafts of liquid fire. Underneath the principal

arch of the Porta itself, once the chief means of access to the city from the northward, a peasant's cart, laden with produce, had stopped; she heard the jingle of the bells on the harness of the mules as they shook their heads; she saw the sun gleam on the peasant's scarlet waistcoat and white shirt sleeves. Close by these, *carabinieri* smoked cigarettes, lounging against the wall of one of the side arches. At the entrance to the Corso, between the churches of S. Maria in Monte Santo and S. Maria de' Miracoli, the queer little horse-car which runs from that point through the Corso itself as far as the Piazza Venezia was waiting, presumably for passengers. Near the Obelisk two or three open cabs were drawn up, their drivers and their horses all apparently asleep. Even from the low slopes of the Pincian horses and men looked little larger than mannikins and miniatures, dream things in a dream.

But Linda did not look long at the beautiful square which spread itself like a yellow carpet at the foot of the terraced hill. There, rising over the grey and purple mists which were slowly rolling along the valley of the Tiber, was the great dome of St. Peter's, massive, profound, very solemn in that fresh morning

light. As the mists rolled away and the cypress-clad hills to the right of the Vatican came clearly into view the mighty church stood revealed in all its awe-compelling grandeur and its mysterious vastness. A sunbeam caught the great cross and transformed it into a blaze of glory; it caught at the same moment the figure of the angel which keeps watch and ward over the castle of St. Angelo. Between the great church and the great castle, circling up to the pine-groves beyond the Janiculan Hill, crept those curious mists, opalescent, weird, which no other river than the Tiber knows. It was as though some hand was drawing aside, with almost imperceptible movement a curtain so unsubstantial as to be a thing of the imagination rather than of fact. But the curtain, filmy, ethereal, rolled back further—Rome became clearer and clearer to her wondering eyes. Domes, towers, spires, high roofs of red, long façades of yellow suddenly became sharp cut against the morning sky. The flattened dome of the Pantheon towered above its adjacent buildings; in the far distance she saw a faint, hazy line of land and knew it for a glimpse of the Campagna. What a prospect! she said to herself—churches, monuments, Imperial Rome, Papal Rome, art, beauty,

magnificence—could there be aught in the world like it !

And suddenly she laughed—laughed happily. Somewhere—perhaps close by—under one of those morning-misted roofs was Pietje—doubtless still fast asleep.

II

MARY GARRENDON, older by many years than Linda, and with none of the younger woman's impulse or restlessness, had been so tired by the through journey from Brussels, and especially by the funeral rate of progress between Pisa and Rome, that she went to sleep as soon as her weary head touched its pillow, and slumbered as soundly as if she had been in her own bed in far-off Yorkshire. She was glad, excited even, in a mild way, to be in Rome, but she was not naturally imaginative, and so did not dream of Cæsars or Pontiffs—she did not even reflect upon the fact that the Colosseum was within half a mile of her, or that she was going to bed in the heart of a city which has seen more and done more than any city that we so far know of. And sleeping with a clear conscience and a tired body she did not wake until it was seven o'clock and the October sun shone into her window.

It was her habit to rise when she woke, and she was not minded to break it on this occasion. Looking about her room after she left her bed she caught sight of a sheet of note-paper which had been thrust under the door. Picking it up she read this message in Linda's characteristic handwriting, bold and big :

“DEAR MARY,—If you can sleep, I can't (this is 6 A.M.). I am going out, after my coffee. Follow my example . . . when you wake. If we don't meet earlier, we will meet at noon—here.—LINDA.”

Mary Garrendon smiled and made her morning toilet as slowly and as carefully as if she had been in her own surroundings. She discovered a chambermaid who could speak excellent French—yes, the chambermaid said, the so tall and handsome lady had gone forth, unaccompanied, save by a walking-stick, a good hour gone by. Mary smiled again when the chambermaid had departed to send coffee and rolls—she knew that the hour and a half between her own sallying forth and Linda's would make a fine shade of difference in the chambermaid's mind as to the respective degrees of sanity of Linda and herself. To leave one's chamber at half-past seven—well that might be convenable,

on a pinch, but at six, even in such an early rising city, and for a lady of evident position, freshly arrived from a long journey—ah, well, those English. . . .

She went out into the sweet sunlight herself at last, but, unlike Linda, did not wander wherever her fancy took her. Hundreds of people who never go to Rome, who are always hoping to go to Rome, who despair of ever going to Rome, who never will go to Rome, study maps and plans of Rome because of Rome's fascination. Mary Garrendon knew Rome on paper very well indeed—John Garrendon was one of those mono-maniacs who treasure anything in the way of map, chart, plan, on which they may happen to light, and she had often spent a lonely evening, when he was visiting some patient, in tracing out on various maps of the Eternal City the scenes of great events, the way in which such a procession passed, the route by which such-and-such a historic personage entered or left this theatre of the world. And having all these things clearly mapped in her own mind she walked straight out of the Hotel de Russie in the Via del Babuino and turned the corner of S. Maria in Monte Santo, intent upon seeing first and foremost

of all things in Rome, the Corso, the ancient Via Flamina—just as all good Americans are intent, when in London, upon seeing the Strand as being the main artery of its throbbing heart. It was characteristic of her that as she turned the corner of the church she gave no more than one glance at the terraced slopes of the Pincian Hill on her right, nor two at the sunny Piazza del Popolo spread out before her—she meant, with true British insistence, to see the Corso first of anything in Rome, and to follow it all its length, from between its two sentinel-like churches at one end to its termination in the Piazza Venezia at the other. For Mary Garrendon was as systematic as she was kind-hearted and good.

She promenaded the fine old street in leisurely fashion. The Corso, always quiet at that end, was beginning to wake up. The little horse-car had found some passengers and was see-sawing its way between the high grey walls. The devout who had been to Mass were going homeward again—the great leathern curtains before the doors of the churches were continually being drawn aside to give egress to folk whose countenances showed various motions—indifference, accustomedness, spiritual exaltation. A priest,

rotund, cheery, fresh of countenance, shovel-hatted, black-cassocked and sashed, book in one hand and umbrella in the other, went by; a Franciscan, in his brown habit and sandalled feet, went by. In front of the Hotel di Roma certain intending travellers were getting into an omnibus, the top of which was already packed with their baggage—from the voluminousness of the women's veils and their nasal twang Mary set them down for Americans. On the steps of S. Carlo al Corso, a group of women sat, chatting and laughing—dark-haired, black-eyed, powerful-framed Roman women, with gaudy kerchiefs about their swarthy necks and shining rings in their ears. A child which appeared to wear at least a dozen bunchy petticoats, clung on to the knee of one of these matrons, and finger in mouth, looked out of a pair of shy, dusky eyes at the Englishwoman as she passed.

Further along, the Corso developed something like gaiety. Many people came and went; there was much bustle in the neighbourhood of the streets leading in the direction of the post office on one hand, and of the telegraph office on the other, and in the Piazza Colonna, dominated by its great column once sacred to Marcus Aurelius but long since topped by a figure of

St. Paul, there was so much coming and going that Mary stopped to take in the scene at her leisure. Cabs, open and shut; very smart Roman professional men going to their offices; blue-coated soldiers; bersaglieri with great plumes and little swords; women, from the narrow streets of the Tiber, blue-aproned, bare-headed; cassocked priests; habited friars, black, brown, white, grey; foreigners armed with guide-books and spectacles; flower-sellers; idlers; children, any one of whom might have made a model for an artist; grandeur; picturesqueness; here and there something poor and ugly and sordid—an old woman in pitiful rags, a cripple with a loathsome disease—and around all the subtle atmosphere of Rome, its suggestiveness, its scent.

Mary Garrendon was one of those women who take a great delight in looking into shop windows. Whenever she visited London she could fill up an entire morning in inspecting the windows of Regent Street; a whole afternoon in exhausting Bond Street. And finding that at the end of the Corso the shops were handsome and attractive she began to pursue her favourite occupation when on an idle holiday and to see what the shopkeepers of Rome had to offer.

She examined in detail the contents of a pastry-cook's window and decided that confectionery is either a lost art in England or one which has never been known there. From this she passed to the window of a jeweller and after wondering greatly at the fine things she saw within, turned to a milliner's establishment and became lost in admiration. It was at the next window that she received a shock which was so sudden, so unexpected, that for the moment she could not realise that she was in Rome, that she was anywhere. . . .

Mary Garrendon pulled herself together and arrived sharply at realisation. She was standing in front of a shop wherein were sold engravings, etchings, old plates. From the character of these she perceived at once that this was an establishment of high standing—having herself some knowledge of collecting she knew that the old plates were really old and that the engravings and etchings were of rare quality. This she saw at a glance. But the fact merely impressed itself upon her and was instantly forgotten. A weightier and more important fact—one fraught, it seemed to her, with consequences which she did not dare to think of, was there before her, tangible, insistent, menacing. It was as if she,

walking childlike and innocent through a new play-room, full of heard-of-but-never-yet-realised-good-things to see and handle, had suddenly been confronted by a bogey whose very appearance at the unexpected moment was sufficient to warn her of impending catastrophe.

There, straight before her eyes, in the very centre of the window, in the place of honour, was—Linda van de Linde! Linda—as she remembered Linda as the Linda of thirteen years ago. A head-and-shoulders Linda—the head turned a little to one side; the great eyes laughing and dancing; the ripe lips smiling, a little roguishly; the full, rich throat. . . .

Underneath the wonderfulness of the engraving, the title in Italian and English and French and German. *The Dream of a Day and Night.*

Close under the plate in a hurried pencil scrawl the one word *Albaccina*.

Over the engraving, on a card, printed in gold letters, an announcement in the four languages just mentioned that here was a rare specimen of the famous engraving of the Marquis of Albaccina's still more famous picture, now the property of Hieronymus P. Quatzenberg, of New York, U.S.A.

Mary Garrendon, who had begun to use spectacles for reading purposes, drew a pair from her pocket and put them on. She made a further critical inspection of the picture. Yes . . . Linda. For no other woman in all the world ever had Linda's face, eyes, lips, chin.

She looked from the picture to its surroundings and saw an announcement to the effect that in that establishment French, German, and English were spoken. Seeing this, she walked into the shop ; there to be met by a smiling Italian who had already watched her through the window, and had not failed, being as astute as all Romans are, to see certain signs of agitation on her face during her inspection of the engraving.

" You speak English, sir ? "

The proprietor bowed.

" Yes, madam. I have had the honour to spend many years in London."

" I wish to know the price of the engraving in your window—*The Dream of a Day and Night*."

" Ah, yes, madam, after the Marquis of Albaccina's famous painting. Permit me."

The proprietor took the engraving out of his window and exhibited it with many signs of admiration for its properties and beauties. Now that Mary saw it at closer quarters she

recognised its life-like quality more keenly than ever.

“The price, madam, is five hundred *lire*.”

Then, seeing an almost imperceptible start on the part of his customer, he hastened to add with a smile and a shrug of his shoulders,

“After all, madam, that is only twenty pounds English.”

Mary was looking at the pencilled autograph. She pointed to it.

“That, I suppose, is the artist’s signature?”

“Oh, yes, madam. And here the engraver’s—Carlo Romaldi.”

Mary was thinking deeply, in spite of the fact that her brain was still in something of a whirl. That this was a picture of Linda, that it had originally been painted by the famous Marquis of Albaccina, whose guests Monsieur Verbeke and Pietje now were, that the Marquis was, must be, Adrian Darrell, was as certain as that Linda, coming along the Corso as she undoubtedly would over and over again, would with her sharp observant eyes, see it. And then. . . .

“This is, I suppose, a copy of a very famous painting?” she said, diffidently.

“Yes, madam. One of the most famous of the Marquis’s greater works. But it was only

exhibited once—at our academy here. And then, madam, but for a short time—the rich American, Mr. Quatzenberg, bought it. It is said”—here the proprietor’s voice became reverential—“it is said (though, of course, no one knows) that the American gave fifteen thousand pounds for it ! However, the Marquis stipulated that a certain number of plates of it should be engraved—he had given his word to Romaldi that that should be done. Just a certain number, madam—of which, as you see, this is number eleven. I had also numbers two and four—I sold those for forty pounds and forty guineas each respectively.”

“A limited number ?” said Mary.

“Very limited indeed, madam. I can give my personal guarantee,” said the proprietor with a solemn air, “that there is not in Rome, no, nor in Italy, another copy of this engraving. This is the last. And to be fair,” he went on in a sudden burst of candour, “I could not afford to sell this for twenty pounds, madam, but for the fact that it is slightly damaged—just slightly damaged. Only an expert could detect it—but it is so. See there, madam, you see just that little defect ?”

Mary could see nothing beyond a mere dis-

coloration at the point which the proprietor's daintily polished finger-nail indicated.

"That is it," said the proprietor. "A slight thing, but——"

"Since you assure me that this is the only copy of the engraving remaining in Rome," said Mary, drawing out her purse, "I will buy it. And as I do not wish it sent to my hotel, where it might be damaged, I should be glad if you would pack it carefully, and seal it up, and keep it for me until I call for it before leaving Rome. You are quite sure that there is no other copy in the city?"

She went out into the sunlight five minutes later twenty pounds poorer and with a heart as heavy as the stones of S. Marcello, under whose shadow she paused for a moment to think.

What had she found out? What was going to happen?

And what could one poor spinster do to prevent the last act of a tragedy?

III

MARY GARRENDON went out of the print-seller's shop feeling as if that particular house of life into which it had been her lot to be born had been burned to cinders around her while she remained scatheless yet wondering amidst its ashes. And being a woman, and moreover, an English-woman, she voiced her feelings in an expressive phrase, and voiced them aloud :

" Well, who'd have thought it ! "

She was not at all sure, yet, what she herself thought or felt : certainly she realised nothing, until, having walked some thirty or forty yards further along the Corso, she came to a halt before a magnificently appointed chemist's shop, and found herself wondering how it was that one should find certain well-known English goods vaunting themselves in Roman windows. She repeated their names over and over again, just as children, from mere force of habit, say, " Eena, deena, dina, do," or " Dickery, ickery, thickery, thick." . . .

So-and-so's Soap. Just as you would see it anywhere in London.

Such-and-such-an-one's Pills. Just as you would see them in any chemist's shop in Leeds.

Such-a-body's Plaister. Just as you would see it advertised in Leicester . . . or in Lancaster . . . or in Lewes.

All roads lead to Rome !

She began to think more clearly as she went away from the fascinations of the big pharmacy. She came to the end of the Corso—before her rose the frowning dark mass of the Palazzo Venezia. She stood staring at its gaunt walls, thinking.

It was a problem worth thinking of. Here was Rome. Here in Rome, without doubt, was Adrian Darrell, now known as the Marquis of Albaccina. Here in Rome, equally without doubt, was Madame Van der Huysen, who in truth was Linda van de Linde. Here in Rome, too, was the boy Pietje, who was the son of these two. And the boy Pietje was the guest of his father, and his father did not know who the boy was, nor the boy know who his father was—and the mother must necessarily, unless she, Mary Garrendon, could prevent it, descend upon both.

Standing there, gazing about her with eyes which saw everything and cared for nothing, Mary Garrendon caught such a sudden in-vision of the mystic subterranean river of life as she had never dreamed of catching. It was gone in a flash—as it always is. And so—as everybody does who has just caught one glimpse of it and lost it—she resorted to the commonplace. No one who had seen her turn back into the Corso—on the opposite side to that which she had traversed—who had watched her inspect more shops, and (to all outward appearance) behave as the ordinarily well-regulated Englishwoman abroad does behave, could have thought that she was pursuing anything more than the usual avocation of the peaceful tourist. And yet . . .

All roads lead to Rome !

She turned up the Via Condotti, minded to see its stores of antiques, its jewels, its mosaics, and there in its cool shade she met Linda, whose arms were full of flowers, whose hands were crammed with packages, whose eyes were gay with life. A ragged, black-eyed, bare-footed boy, in whose battered hat, an equally battered cock's feather, made swashbuckler show, followed at her heels, adoring her, and carrying more flowers and packages. Passers-

by, loungers, folk at the shop-doors looked at her with spring in their eyes and leaping love in their warm hearts.

"Mary! Carry some of these things—do, there's a good soul! Why, you're carrying nothing! And look at the boy—isn't he a darling?—aren't you, Jacopo mio?—I've learnt that much, anyway—look at his beautiful, black, bold, shy, velvety eyes—Mary, aren't they just like Pietje's? Where have you been, Mary? I? Oh, I've been knocking about all over—never mind—it's a dream—a dream! Let's get back to the Russie—I'm hungry. And yet—I want to buy everything I see. I've bought a veil—sort of mantilla thing—in which to visit His Holiness, and a silk scarf-thing, all sorts of colours—and pictures—and a ring—and heaps of picture post-cards—and . . ."

She stopped short.

"Mary, you're looking tired! And yet you slept—didn't you, dear?"

Mary Garrendon forced a smile.

"Yes, I slept very well, Linda. But I am—tired. I've been knocking about, as you call it, for nearly two hours. And—I'm beginning to feel my middle-age."

"Then, as I said, let's get back to the Russie. I've bespoken—sounds like a cheap-tailor's-shop-sign in England, doesn't it?—a table to be expressly reserved always for Madame and Ma'amselle—oh, I beg pardon, La Signora and La Signorina—with all honour and ceremony. Jacopo, figlio mio, *botti, botti!*"

Linda yawned openly as she and Mary Garrendon drove away in the open conveyance which the worshipping Jacopo fetched them.

"Do you know, Mary," she said, "I believe that after *déjeuner* I shall go to bed? I never slept a wink last night—or, rather, this morning—I was so excited. And now—see how I'm yawning!"

"And Pietje?" suggested Mary Garrendon.

Linda laughed—the happy laugh of perfect content.

"Pietje? Oh, Pietje's all right. Pietje doesn't know that his mother's near him, but Pietje's mother knows that he's near her. You don't understand, do you, Mary, but, you see, now that he's—well, just close by—somewhere close by . . ."

IV

THERE was no unhappier woman in Rome or in the world that afternoon than Mary Garrendon. That worst of all forms of unhappiness was hers—anxiety for others whom she cared for. If she had been called to face trouble or pain of her own she would have gone bravely and fearlessly to meet either and to endure whatever was laid upon her. But when she saw something, vague, shapeless, inchoate, hovering meaningly over those she loved, about to strike, to descend, at some unguessed-of moment, and felt herself powerless to avert the blow, to arrest the descent, then all her courage seemed to leave her and she knew herself for what we all are at such moments—mere spin-drift going racketing down a river in flood that must surely pour itself into a careless sea.

It was very quiet and very delightful, there, in the garden of the Russie that afternoon, and if she had had nothing to trouble her Mary

Garrendon would have welcomed the rest, and the mellow October warmth, and her surroundings with great thankfulness. But everything was swept away from her. In her room in the hotel there, Linda, having lunched to her heart's content, and turned everybody's heads by her beauty, her spirits, her gaiety, was sleeping like a child that is weary of play—Mary had looked in upon her and had turned heart-sick at the terrible likeness of the happy sleeping face to the picture which she had bought that morning and had seen carefully sealed up. She laughed a little bitterly as she thought of that first result of her panic. What use had it been, buying that engraving just because she feared that Linda would see it? What use?—when a mere turning of a corner might bring Pietje's father and Pietje's mother face to face!—face to face after all these years. What use?—when the man and the woman must inevitably meet?

Mary Garrendon was at most times what we call a managing woman—she was shrewd, capable, self-sufficient, able to do a great many things and to do them well. But she confessed to herself as she sat in that sunny garden beneath the slopes of the Pincio that here was something quite beyond her powers. She felt as one feels

who looks on at some vast machine which a mere touch may have set in motion but nothing save a miracle can stop.

"I might as well be a jelly fish!" she said bitterly.

And that, of course, made her think of what a man might do. She was not a little of an advanced woman herself, and had political notions somewhat in advance of most of her sister women, but she was no fool, and she possessed the real feminine feeling of instinctive turning to the much-abused male when there was a big thing to be done, a real problem to be solved. And she had never wished for anything in her life so much as she wished at that moment for a man's help and counsel. She was tempted to curse the fate that had made her woman instead of man.

"I'll send for John," she said at last in a fury of desperation. "He'll come—he's Linda's trustee—he must come at once."

And with that she set off to the telegraph office and there despatched a message which made John Garrendon, away in far-off Yorkshire, jump in the warm slippers wherein he had just bestowed his weary feet :

Come here at once there is serious trouble ahead.—Mary.

She felt a certain amount of relief after sending that message. She knew John. He had an assistant now, and could leave his work whenever he wished to do so. He would have the telegram that evening; he would catch a night train at Doncaster, and the morning boat at Dover, and within two days he would be there in Rome. Meanwhile. . . .

Yes, meanwhile?

She felt like a lost and desolate thing when she realised what that one word *meanwhile* really meant. Forty-eight hours of standing stock still without a man to lean upon!

"However, it's no use doing nothing," she suddenly said. "I'll go somewhere. Linda will sleep like a top until dinner-time."

So she walked decisively into the Piazza Colonna and got into an open cab, whose driver after waking himself succeeded in awaking his horse.

"San Pietro in Vaticano," commanded Mary.

The driver nodded, shook his whip, and turning his horse went slowly away towards the Via di Coronari and the Ponte St. Angelo. After the fashion of Roman cab-drivers he indicated whatever places of interest he passed, always in staccato sentences and with jerks of

his whip. Mary Garrendon scarcely saw anything that he pointed out—she was conscious of crossing the Tiber and thought it nearly as dirty as the Humber or the Thames ; she was also conscious of the castle of St. Angelo and of the fact that the narrow street by which she approached St. Peter's was, in spite of its gloom and dirt, dedicated to, or called after, the Holy Ghost . . . that word *meanwhile* was in her ears and written up before her eyes. . . .

However, there was St. Peter's.

Like everybody else she had cherished dreams of her own about the moment when she should first set eyes on this church. Now that she saw it—saw it as she descended from a commonplace, shabby, little cab, driven by an unshaven man to whom neither St. Peter's nor the Vatican were more than St. Paul's is to the average London clerk who scarcely knows it from one of its surrounding warehouses—she was suddenly conscious of a vast rush of strange new feeling which she could scarcely voice and as scarcely understood. She remained there a moment to look across the great piazza, with its sweeping colonnades, its towering obelisk, its glittering fountains, at the mighty dome swelling into the blue autumn sky and at the golden cross high

above it, silent, yet eloquent. How little the little *meanwhiles*. . . .

She went slowly across the ever-widening space, up the ever-spreading steps: the great church swallowed her up.

Were those two thoughts ever going to get out of her mind?

All roads lead to Rome!

Meanwhile?

It seemed to her as she stood by the Confession of St. Peter, gazing into the vast immensity of the dome above, that some master-hand, pulling those threads of life at the ends of which Darrell, and Linda, and Pietje dangled, was purposely drawing them together here—for what? Those lives—father, mother, child. For what—for what?

There are in the left transept of St. Peter's a number of confessionals, over each of which is set out an announcement specifying in what language confessions may there be heard. When the clergy who attend these confessionals are not engaged they walk about the transept reading their office, waiting until their services may be required. Mary Garrendon, wandering aimlessly about the church suddenly caught sight of the word *English* over one of these

confessionals. Walking up and down in front of it, reading his breviary, was an old priest, spectacled, white-haired. She obeyed a sudden impulse and went up to him.

"May I speak to you, sir?" she said.

The old priest looked at his questioner with a benignant glance and bowed his acquiescence. He half turned towards his confessional—Mary shook her head.

"No," she said, "it is not that—I am not a Catholic. But I want some advice—I want to confide in some one—and some one who is of my own country. Are you an Englishman, sir?"

"Yes," answered the old priest. "I am an Englishman. Is it spiritual advice that you need?"

"No," replied Mary. "Nor is it advice for myself. It is a difficult matter to explain—there is no one in Rome to whom I can speak of it, and I thought perhaps, seeing the word English there——"

"Yes, I see—I understand. You are a stranger in Rome?"

"Yes, sir. I came to Rome last night with a friend, and since our arrival I have been faced by a difficult problem which is occasioning me

great distress. I have sent for my brother, who is a well-known doctor, but he cannot arrive for quite two days, and in the meantime——”

“Yes, I understand,” said the old priest. “You want to talk something over with somebody of your own nationality—that is it?”

“Yes,” replied Mary. “Perhaps I ought not to have troubled you—and here. You must forgive me if——”

“No, no,” said the old man kindly. “That is quite right. Now, I am thinking how I can be of use to you. I shall be free of attendance here in about three-quarters of an hour—can you meet me at that time in the portico of the church?—then perhaps we can talk a little?”

Mary thanked this new friend warmly and left him to his breviary and his perambulations. She felt relieved at the thought of pouring out her troubles to somebody, and the old priest had a sympathetic manner and a kind face. And she was approaching a stage of mental anxiety which made it impossible for her to keep silence any longer—if she did not pour out the grief to some one she would have to

tell everything to Linda. And then . . . she dare not think of that eventuality.

She was walking restlessly up and down the portico when the old priest, who wore a very large and very rusty hat and carried an umbrella almost as large as himself, joined her, nodding pleasantly. He indicated the sunniest part of the piazza below.

"We will walk where the sun shines," he said smiling. "My old bones begin to feel the chilliness of these great aisles and transepts. And now tell me the trouble."

Mary Garrendon, who was nothing if not orderly and systematic, introduced herself to her companion and gave him her card and her brother's. And then as they walked up and down in the sunny piazza she told him the story of Linda from the time of her girlhood until that very day, of the discovery which she, Mary, had made that morning, and of her terrible fear as to what might happen if—as seemed inevitable—Linda and Albacinna met.

The old priest listened carefully, nodding his head at various points, but never interrupting the story. When Mary had finished he remained silent for a few moments.

"You are quite sure," he said at last, "that

there is no doubt at all that the picture you saw this morning is of your friend ? ”

“ Oh, none ! ” replied Mary with decision. “ If you saw her, even now, when some years have gone by, you would recognise the picture as hers. ”

“ She must be a very beautiful woman. I remember the original—I saw it at the Marquis’s house before it was sold. Oh, yes, I remember it quite well. ”

“ Then you know the Marquis ? ” asked Mary eagerly.

“ I have met him, ” replied the old priest. “ And now and then, in company with a great many other people, I have visited his house when he has had private views of his pictures. From your description of him, Miss Garrendon, I do not think there is any doubt that he is the young man you knew. ”

Mary almost gasped for breath. She had had no doubt since her discovery of that morning that Adrian Darrell and the Marquis of Albaccina were one and the same, but the corroboration of her conclusion by another person came like a shock.

“ But how could any man so treat a girl ! ” she burst out. “ To leave her in silence all

these years ! It is—oh, I don't know what to say."

The old priest nodded his grey head emphatically.

"Quite so," he said. "One doesn't know what to say. Now, the Marquis bears an excellent character for kindness and benevolence. I have never heard a word against him, though he is not of the church, you understand. He is a very wealthy man, married to a very handsome wife——"

"Are there any children ?" asked Mary.

"No—they have no children. I have heard it said that they are devoted to each other. Certainly the Marquis has always struck me as being a man of great charm and of a kindly nature—which makes this matter all the more unexplainable. He is not the sort of man to wrong any one, and especially a woman. He has always been a much-talked-of man—he succeeded to his title and estates under very romantic circumstances, as you doubtless know."

"I ?" said Mary. "No—I never heard of him until recently. My brother knew his name as an artist."

"Well, the circumstances were perhaps more remarkable than romantic," continued the old

priest. "I remember people talking a good deal about them at the time. The Albaccinas are an old race—one of the oldest of the old Roman families. That the present Marquis would ever succeed to the title seemed quite out of the question some thirteen years ago. He was the son of a younger son who had left Italy as a young man, and gone, I believe, to America—certainly he married an American wife. He died, I think the story goes, when the present Marquis was quite a child, and between him and his elder brother, who then had the title, there was another brother who had two sons—I knew them all. Therefore when the present Marquis—who was, I am sure, educated and brought up in England—was come to manhood there were no less than five lives between him and the title. Then came the catastrophe which gave the title and the wealth to him."

"A catastrophe?" inquired Mary. "Ah—now I am beginning to think of something. It was some startling news which sent Darrell away so quickly from the Yorkshire farm."

"It was most probably the news of this catastrophe. The then Marquis, his son, his brother and his brother's two sons were all drowned by the capsizing of the Marquis's

yacht. That was off the Sicilian coast. Then this young man appeared on the scene—of course to take up his heritage.”

Mary Garrendon heard this in silence. She walked by the old priest's side for a time, wondering what must be done. That Darrell was found at last seemed certain. And now—what would happen ?

She turned and looked at the old man beseechingly.

“ You have been so kind to me, father,” she said. “ Tell me what I ought to do. There is the boy to think of—and then there is the wife. Oh—it's dreadful—I'm dreading the meeting which must take place—I can't see how it can be averted.”

“ No—no,” replied the old priest thoughtfully. “ No—it cannot be averted if she remains in Rome. No—those three threads are being drawn together, Miss Garrendon—father, mother, child, and it is not in our power to prevent it. Those two poor souls will meet just as suddenly as they parted. But I will tell you what I will do—I am an old man now and may exercise an old man's privileges—I will go myself this evening and see the Marquis of Albaccina and tell him the truth—that his little guest is his son.”

V

MARY GARRENDON went back to the hotel not a little comforted by the old priest's kindness—it was something to have shared her dreadful secret with a sympathetic listener and to feel that she was not without a friend in this unfamiliar city. And yet she could see nothing before them all but trouble, sorrow—an indefinite and shapeless mass of darkness.

“I suppose it's harvest,” she sighed. “After all, you can't very well sow anything without a crop coming up, whether you reap it or not. It's bound to spring up somehow.

The worst of it at that particular juncture was the fact of Linda's good spirits and active brightness. To Mary, pre-occupied, anxious, so nervous already that she dreaded turning a street corner lest she should meet Pietje and his host, Linda's perpetual flow of chatter and laughter began to have an effect which was as like as not to send Mary into a flood of tears or a tendency to scream, though she was by

nature anything but a hysterical woman. It was like sitting on a box wherein an infernal machine was slowly ticking its way to the appointed hour for its explosion, or being held by a merciless giant hand over some fiery abyss into which one might be dropped at any moment. Some curious feminine quality made Mary feel that she could have cheerfully slapped her companion when she found her, now thoroughly rested by her afternoon's sleep and looking a picture of hearty and handsome young womanhood, making an elaborate dinner toilet with as much pleasure and interest in her own doings as if she were a veritable flirt intent on capturing the hearts of whatever men she chanced to come across. It made the elder woman think of all manner of things, apposite and not—of an old dandy cutting a jig on the edge of his own grave ; of men cracking jokes a moment before the whirring knife of the guillotine smote away their heads from their shoulders ; of an unsuspecting child wandering, gleeful and singing, on the very edge of some steep cliff over which a sudden gust of wind was presently to dash it. . . .

“Upon my word, Linda!” she exclaimed somewhat snappishly. “Why, dear me, you might be going to Court.”

Linda, who was fixing certain earrings, of which

she was very proud, in her ears, caught the irritation in Mary's voice and turned from her mirror.

"What's the matter, Mary?" she asked. "You sound tired. Ah, I see, you've been tramping about instead of resting—as I advised you to do."

"No," answered Mary, sinking into an easy chair with a sigh which belied her words. "I've been to St. Peter's, but I rode there and back. Still—I think I am tired. I'm not as young as you, Linda."

Linda regarded her carefully.

"I know what's the matter with you," she said. "You're going to have one of your bilious attacks—you generally do after a long railway journey, don't you? Why, you're yellow! And you've got holes under your eyes. Look here, Mary—go to bed and have some tea and some toast, and some light supper later on. You're a lot too tired to dress for dinner, or to go down to it, either."

"I think I shall lie down, if you don't mind dining alone," said Mary. "I have a splitting headache."

"Of course, I don't mind—do you suppose anybody will run away with me?" said Linda.

"Come along to your room and I'll bathe your forehead with Eau-de-Cologne and get you some tea—I had some, good, an hour or more ago—and make you generally comfortable. And I'll doctor you up to-night and you'll be all right in the morning."

Mary was by this time in a state of non-resistance. Her head was indeed aching out of sheer inability to think longer. She let Linda minister to her, and made no resistance. But when she was left alone she reminded herself that this was only a putting-off: the fatal moment was bound to come.

"However, I can't do anything," she said miserably. "I can't—do—anything. It'll have to go on now. It's Fate."

As she lay in her room, alone, after Linda had gone down to dinner, the French-speaking chambermaid brought her a note with an air of secrecy.

"For ma'amselle," she said, "and for no one else, then."

Mary turned on the light at the side of her bed and looked with interest at the little missive which the girl handed to her. The envelope was odd in shape—a small oblong envelope such as were seen in England in the 'seventies,

with a figure of a little dove, bearing a leaf in its mouth, embossed on the flap—the handwriting in which it was addressed to *Miss Garrendon, Hotel de Russie*, was very delicate and minute and somewhat crabbed. Mary instinctively felt that it was from the old priest and opened it with a beating heart.

“DEAR MADAM,” the note ran, “on calling at his house early this evening I found that the gentleman we spoke of this afternoon is not in Rome at this time. He left for Florence yesterday, and will be there for the next two or three days. In the meantime if I can be of further service to you, have the kindness to let me know what I can do. Truly yours, William Penrose.”

Mary slipped this communication into her pocket with a certain feeling of relief. The dreaded meeting could not occur for a few days, and in the meantime John would arrive. Perhaps—perhaps it might be avoided altogether.

But in the meantime—oh, that meantime!—there was Linda to reckon with—Linda, happy now that she was close to her boy, and bursting with life and spirits and capacity.

VI

WHEN Linda went to bed that night, after assuring herself that Mary was asleep, she drew aside the curtains and the blinds of her windows and let a full moon pour its silvery radiance into her chamber. It shone out of a wide-spreading dome of deep blue—a round, shining lamp before whose glory that of the stars paled. In the hushed garden beneath her windows the moonlight made wide patches; here and there across them fell the shadows of ilex and cypress, of a dancing faun or a wood-nymph, the marble of these latter snow-white in the night's silence.

“It's the harvest moon in England,” she said, as she looked out.

She never saw that October moon without thinking of Adrian Darrell, and now, as she leaned against the casement her great eyes grew dark and soft with the memories of the past. Where was he?

Oh, no need to ask that now, she said passionately. Dead—long since!—or he would have come to her. She would never see him again—in this world, she was sure, and of any other she had none but the vaguest notions—but she was as true to him and to his memory as when she had given him all that woman can give.

And, closing the blinds, she smiled—smiled happily. For there, somewhere near her, in that great city, was their boy—his child and hers.

VII

INSTEAD of being prostrated by the bilious attack which Linda had cheerfully predicted for her, Mary Garrendon felt much more like her usual self next morning. For one thing she had slept well ; for another she knew that every hour was bringing John nearer. She had a supreme confidence in his ability to surmount difficulties and she believed that if he could only reach Rome before Linda and the Marquis met he would be able to induce the former to return to Bruges. He had tact and persuasion ; Linda, she felt, would listen to him where she would listen to no one else. And since, as Father Penrose had informed her, the Marquis was to be away for a few days, the fateful meeting might yet be avoided, though the necessary explanations, the inevitable shock must come. It was impossible to keep the secret from Linda ; she must be told of it for Pietje's sake as well as for her own. It was a relief to Mary

to know that her brother would be able to break it.

Linda was gayer than ever that morning. She and Mary took their coffee together in a quiet corner of a room overlooking the gardens—the autumn sunlight seemed to get into Linda's blood. She was going to do all sorts of things, but first of all, seeing that Mary was better she would have a two-horsed open carriage and they would drive round Rome, not stopping to go inside church, or museum, or picture-gallery, but just getting a notion of the exterior of the city. And as the day promised to be so fine and warm they would lunch at some open-air restaurant—preferably where they could see something of the life of Rome. In the afternoon they would rest, and in the evening they would go to the theatre.

“And Pietje?” Mary could not help saying.

“Oh, Pietje and Monsieur Verbeke are all right,” answered Linda. “Now that I'm where I can put my finger on him at a moment's notice I've lost my restlessness about Pietje. I want to play hide-and-seek with my two children in Rome—we shall hit upon them somewhere, sooner or later; and poor Monsieur Verbeke will rub his great nose with wonder, and Pietje's

big eyes will grow round with astonishment—it will be worth a fortune to see their surprise ! ”

“ Yes, but supposing we don’t run across them ? ” asked Mary, who was secretly praying that the meeting might be avoided until John came. “ What then ? ”

Linda shrugged her shoulders in her old characteristic way.

“ Oh, that’s obvious ! ” she replied. “ We’ll just find out where the Palazzo Albaccina is, and put on our best gowns and go and knock at the door and ask to see this very great man. I expect I shall hate him,” she continued with a sudden burst, “ especially if he’s made Pietje like him dreadfully, and yet I’m sure he’s being most kind to the boy. However, I shan’t spare Pietje to him much longer, and if Pietje’s so wrapped up in Rome that he must needs live here—well, we shall have to leave Bruges, that’s all.”

Then, remarking that she was dying to get into the sun, she went off to order exactly what she wanted in the way of an equipage, and Mary Garrendon, asking herself for the thousandth time how it all was going to end, finished her coffee and reflected upon the extraordinary complexities of human life.

Linda knew exactly where she wanted to go and how to get there. After due examination of a map of Rome on the previous evening she had written out a list of particular places and points of vantage to which the driver was to proceed in rotation. He now received strict orders to stop at each of these just as long as she commanded, and then to drive on to the next: above everything not to attempt the part of guide, which, she explained to a very obsequious hall-porter who already worshipped her magnificent beauty, would annoy her.

"I am quite equal to all that myself," she said to Mary Garrendon as they drove away. "I hate being told this is that, or that is this when having eyes and a certain amount of common sense, I know it myself."

"I wonder what you're not equal to, Linda," remarked Mary. "You're the most self-sufficient woman I ever knew, and you always get your own way."

"Not quite always," said Linda, "but I mean to have it while I'm here. Besides, when one's in such life and spirits as I am just now, isn't it good to live, and isn't one of the best things in the joy of living the ability to do as one likes? Why not dance in the sun if one feels inclined?"

"If I were a Scotchwoman," said Mary, "I should say you were *fey*."

But Linda laughed and retorted that so far from having any premonitions of sudden death or disaster she had never felt so like living in her life. And therewith, having learnt all the necessary passages in the guide-books by heart, and turning to a *Baedeker* when her memory failed her, she set herself to play the part of guide to her companion.

Linda's notion of obtaining a final superficial glance at the exterior of Rome was like her own nature, large and comprehensive. She pursued what she called an inclusive circle which proved to be as irregular as her own whim. Along the Corso first; then up the hill to the Quirinal, where she insisted upon stopping until they saw the dome of St. Peter's rise clear above the mists across the valley; thence as far as the Porta Pia and back again to the Baths of Diocletian, now, she explained to Mary, converted into a church, which was, she said, a pity, seeing that a considerable number of the poorer folk looked as if they stood in need of free baths. Hence to S. Maria Maggiore, and thence to the Scala Santa and the piazza in front of St. John Lateran, where she was minded to leave the carriage and walk about for a good

hour admiring the far-spreading view. But she would not be induced to step within the walls of any of these places—outside first, inside afterwards, she said ; she wanted to enjoy the sun, and, besides, there might be rainy days to come. And following out her plans she drove Mary down to the Colosseum, and past the Forum, and thence to the Pantheon, and so by narrow streets and the bridge of St. Angelo to the little Piazza Rusticucci in front of the greater piazza of St. Peter's, where catching sight of certain open-air *cafés* she decided, it then being past noon, that she was very hungry and that they would lunch.

It was while they sat at lunch that the shadow fell across the sunlit path along which Linda was just then dancing.

An open carriage came at a quick pace round the corner of the piazza from the direction of the Porta Cavalleggieri. The two women looked up involuntarily at its smart horses, its smart liveries. And in its solitary occupant they suddenly realised Monsieur Verbeke. Just as suddenly they recognised that the old man was in profound distress. Separated from him but by a few yards they saw that he was weeping ; that his whole attitude was one of trouble,

despair. In that fine equipage he looked a queer, odd, pathetic figure ; his old head shook, his lips were moving as if he talked to himself. And—so quickly does the human brain, the human eye act at these moments—both women, gazing spell-bound at the tear-stained cheeks of the little Belgian, saw at the same time that the coachman on his box and the footman at his side were, if not tearful, at least sore downcast.

Mary Garrendon saw Linda's face blanch to the colour of old ivory and the rich colour leave her lips. Before she herself could move Linda had leapt towards the carriage with a sharp cry.

“ Monsieur Verbeke ! ”

The old man started, stared—his mouth opened with astonishment. The coachman looking round, pulled his horses on to their haunches. Linda seized Monsieur Verbeke's arm and shook it. Mary came running up as the old tutor found his breath.

“ Oh, Madame Van der Huysen—I—I am bewildered—I was on my way to telegraph for you—they thought I should best know how to word it. Oh, my God—my God, what trouble dost Thou visit us with !—I cannot tell her ! ”

Linda shook him fiercely.

"Pietje?" she said, in a voice that Mary cringed to hear. "Pietje?"

"Madame—it is God's will. The boy has had a bad accident—a fall."

Linda almost threw Mary Garrendon into the carriage. She pointed to the way by which the carriage had come. The coachman turned his horses round, and whipped them into a gallop.

VIII

WHEN Mary Garrendon remembered it afterwards, as she often did, however unwillingly, she always thought of that swift drive up those sunny slopes as constituting the most soul-sickening sensation of her life. The bright morning ; Linda's flow of spirits ; the knowledge that her brother was coming and of her trust in his common sense, had helped Mary to forget much of her doubts and fears—the sudden appearance upon the scene of poor, frightened, tearful Monsieur Verbeke, shaking in his black clothes like some palsied old monk within his cassock, had driven away everything but a sense of coming evil. At such times every object in one's immediate vicinity assumes an air of unreality. The great dome of St. Peter's towering massively to the blue sky above it ; the groves of pine ; the ilex trees ; the green, clinging shrubs which overhung the walls of the villas ; the folk by the wayside—labourers, resting

during the noontide hour, women chattering together, children pausing in their play to stare at the fine equipage and the smart liveries ; the church of S. Maria delle Fornaci, rising above them as they swept along the road at its foot ; the walls enclosing the city—all these things seemed to have become so many phantoms—paper and pasteboard scenes intended for use on a stage. Even Monsieur Verbeke, whose slight figure seemed to have shrunk pitifully, looked like the figment of a dream—the dream-figure of a very old man, frightened and wondering, who knotted his gnarled fingers together and whimpered quietly.

But there was no dream about anything—Mary Garrendon knew that well enough. There was tragedy at hand—its shadow was on Linda's face ; its inevitableness in Linda's eyes ; its pitilessness on Linda's tightly locked lips. It was as if Linda already felt, realised, could see, what Mary dreaded to open her eyes to.

Once, as the coachman urged his horses forward more rapidly, Monsieur Verbeke bent with timid air towards his pupil's mother.

" You see, Madame Van der Huysen," he began, " it was——"

Linda seemed to shrink away from the little

black, desolate figure. She averted her head and lifted a hand.

"Don't!" she said, in a hoarse voice in which was a note that was neither impatient nor harsh. "I—I want to get to him."

A moment later she spoke with great impatience.

"Why don't they drive faster? How slow they are!"

"We are almost there, Madame Van der Huysen," said Monsieur Verbeke, humbly.

"But indeed, they have been very rapid."

Mary Garrenden was conscious of being driven through an arched gateway into a quadrangle which echoed to the feet of the fast-driven horses. She got a hurried impression of a square of bright green turf, of many statues and groups of statuary, of beds of bright flowers and rare plants, of a fountain whose waters flashed gaily in the sunlight, of marble walls and high windows; then of a grand entrance, a wide hall with more plashing and tinkle of water and more flowers and plants; of a great marble staircase; of an atmosphere of wealth, luxury, magnificence; of a curious feeling, coming from some far recess of her mind, that this was the ideal setting for Linda's beauty. . . .

Then there seemed to be quite a company of servants, and one very solemn person in black to whom Monsieur Verbeke was earnestly speaking, and who bowed to Linda and herself with all the grace of a courtier. Then they were climbing the great staircase, and passing through magnificent rooms, and in some of them the sunshine lay in wide patches, illuminating gold and silver and silk and brocade, and in others there was no sunshine at all, but only a softened and chastened light. . . .

And then they were in a smaller room, which seemed to be an ante-room to some other room, and in it there were several persons, men and women, who were either silent or speaking in hushed whispers. And all over that room there seemed to be the premonitory silence which those of us who have felt it never forget.

Out of the people in that room one—a tall, beautiful woman, queen-like in dignity and grace, moulded on as gracious lines as Linda herself and as beautiful with her crown of golden hair as Linda was with hers of raven black, came forward with soft step as she caught sight of Monsieur Verbeke and his companions. Her fine eyebrows arched themselves and her lips parted a little as she looked from one to the other.

“Madame la Marquise,” said Monsieur Verbeke, forgetting his laboriously acquired Italian in his great grief, “it is the boy’s mother.”

A great flood of compassion, of womanly understanding, of pity, swept over the Marchesa’s face. She held out her hands, impulsively, without a word.

“Let me go to him ! ” said Linda in the same half-stifled voice which had been hers since the meeting with Monsieur Verbeke. “Let me go to him—just now.”

The other people standing about, recognising what had occurred, kept silence as the two women crossed the room together. At any other moment they would have said that no two such beautiful women, of such different types had ever been seen side by side before ; at that moment they thought only of what one woman was going to find behind the door for which they were making.

The door opened upon them ; the door closed upon them. Even then no one spoke. A tall, dark-visaged man whom from his dress and appearance Mary Garrendon set down as some person of importance, stood in one of the windows, gazing gloomily into the sunny quadrangle beneath ; two girls, who from their great resemblance to her, she took to be the Marchesa’s

sisters, stood near a massive fireplace, looking thoughtfully into the flames. One of these, glancing at Mary, came up to her and invited her to take a seat. As she spoke in English Mary addressed her in a whisper.

"Can you tell me how this happened?" she said. "And if it is very serious?"

The girl looked at her gravely and for a moment hesitated. She glanced across the room at Monsieur Verbeke and Mary's eyes followed hers. The old tutor, down whose cheeks great tears were falling, was praying with clasped hands and upturned face in a corner of the room.

"You are an old friend?" the girl asked. "He used to speak of a Miss Garrendon—you are she?"

Mary nodded her head. The girl sighed.

"There is no hope," she whispered. "There are two of the greatest surgeons in Rome with him now, but they told my sister half an hour ago that they could do nothing—nothing! They thought he might live for an hour then. No—it's hopeless. Poor—poor boy!"

"Tell me," said Mary, "is he conscious?"

"No—he never regained consciousness. His mother?"

The girl's look expressed more than words.

"It will break her heart," replied Mary.

After a moment she added :

"And she will never cease to reproach herself. Because we have been in Rome since yesterday morning—she could not rest with him out of her sight—and she wanted to surprise him by meeting him suddenly—unexpectedly. Oh, I dread to think of her grief ! "

Then she remembered that there was now another grief in store for Linda—as doubly inevitable as it would now be doubly awful—and she almost cried out with pain. But controlling herself she said :

"I do not even know what happened. Will you tell me ? "

The girl shook her head sadly.

"No one seems to know exactly what did happen," she replied. "Several of us—my two sisters, Baron Aldomarti (she indicated the man at the window) and myself all saw him this morning—he was fencing with the Baron at nine o'clock. Then about eleven Monsieur Verbeke found him lying unconscious in the gardens—the poor old gentleman thought he was dead. There is in the garden a high wall of very ancient masonry—we think he must have climbed to the top of this with the idea of

making a sketch, because his sketch-book and pencil were found by him. Oh, it is dreadful—dreadful! We had all become so fond of him.”

“It will break his mother’s heart,” said Mary again.

The girl sighed.

“We have sent for my brother-in-law,” she said. “He will be agonised—I never saw such an affection as that of his for Pietje, seeing that they were not of kin. He——”

The door opened. The Marchesa came out, weeping—two grave-faced men followed her. They turned aside to the window where the man whom Mary had already noticed stood and she saw them shake their heads. The Marchesa came over to where she sat.

“She wanted to be left alone with him,” she sobbed. “It won’t be long now.”

Half an hour went by. Then the door opened and Linda came out, erect. She looked about her without seeming to see any one in particular.

“He’s dead,” she said quietly. “He died in my arms five minutes since.”

She searched the faces around her again, still seeming not to see them.

“Which—which of you?” she asked.

“Which of you is the Marquis of Albaccina?”

IX

LATE that night Linda knelt by the dead boy, watching him with tearless eyes which were searching the strange immensity into which he had so suddenly passed. They had watched her with great anxiety all that afternoon—she had not given way to violent grief, had so far shed no tear. She had gone about whatever was necessary to do calmly and methodically. Now she had begged them to leave her alone with her boy for awhile—and had asked them to send the Marquis to her there in the death-chamber on his arrival; she wanted, she said, to thank him for his kindness to Pietje in the dead boy's presence. And the Marchesa, understanding, had promised.

Mary Garrendon, hearing this request and the promise, had turned heart-sick. But she knew that no human power, no mortal intervention, could do anything now—the tragedy must play itself out to the end. It was Fate.

Linda shed no tear as she looked on the dead boy's face—quiet and placid and more beautiful than ever in death. Many thoughts were in her mind—the young life cut short; the crushed hope; the strange inscrutableness of the controlling power that lets these things be; the. . . . In the heavy silence which wrapped her and her dead round she at last heard the door softly opened, softly closed again. She rose, looking . . . then, both hands going instinctively to her heart she suddenly moved with dilating eyes towards the man who had entered, alone. They met in the full light of the great wax tapers set about the bier.

Pietje's father and Pietje's mother stared into each other's faces across dead Pietje's body.

"Linda!"

"Adrian!"

"*Your* son?"

"*My* son? *Our* son—yours and mine! Ours!"

He gazed from her to the dead boy; from the dead boy to her; and she saw the sudden realisation of the truth leap into his eyes, saw him clutch at the air as if he would fall.

"Our son?" he repeated. "Our son!"

She stood gazing at him in silence for a full moment. Then she spoke.

“ Oh, Adrian ! ” she said. “ Since you were living, why didn’t you come back—why didn’t you ? If you could only know how I waited—hoped—believed—trusted you, oh, so implicitly ! —how I loved and cared for the boy because he was ours—yours ! Oh, it’s all coming back to me now, that weary time, that dreadful waiting . . . and I’d begun to forget it. And Pietje . . . oh, my heart—will it never, never break ! But never mind—you’ve known him, and loved him, and been kind to him—and, after all, he’s died in his father’s house ! ”

Then she suddenly swayed and fell, mercifully unconscious at last, by the side of the dead boy.

X

No human being ever heard of that meeting from Linda van de Linde's lips. Mary Garrendon guessed at what happened; reconstructed the scene for herself from the fact that soon after the Marquis had gone to the death-chamber Linda was brought from it, unconscious. No one else seemed to feel that to be a matter of unusual moment; it was the general opinion that a meeting with the man who had shown so much kindness and affection for her boy had at last snapped the string of emotion which had been kept at such awful tension for so many hours. When she came to herself she made no reference to what had happened, but merely asked Mary to take her back to the hotel. Neither on that night, nor on the next day, nor at any subsequent time did she ever tell human soul that she had met the dead boy's father by the dead boy's side.

She shed no tears when Pietje was laid to rest

in the little Protestant cemetery in a quiet place shaded by cypress trees. At her own earnest request there was no one there but Mary Garrendon and herself—she begged Monsieur Verbeke to absent himself. She was, indeed, to Mary's eye, unnaturally calm, taking personal charge of many details, and when all was over lingering in the cemetery, pointing out the graves of some of her own countrymen interred there and talking about them in her usual fashion. Mary, being of a different nature and temperament could not understand her. Either she was strung up to an unnatural pitch of intense feeling which must inevitably result in a terrible outburst, or she was summoning all the vast powers within her to bear her sorrow with fortitude. She looked round once when they left the cemetery, and hesitated, as if she were considering whether she should go back or not—then she turned away with a strangely peaceful look on her face. And Mary, watching her closely, saw that the strained, dazed look was gradually dying out of her eyes, and wondered more than ever. But she shed some tears that night when John Garrendon arrived, and the three were together. That was no violent outburst, such as Mary had half-dreaded, half-

wished to see, but what Mary herself would have called "a quiet cry," and when it was over Linda dried her eyes and smiled at them.

"I'm not going to cry any more," she said, with something of her old girlish manner, and not a little of the old girlish defiance. "I'm going to be brave. It's over now—but I was his mother, and so proud of him that I'm always going to be worthy of him. I don't understand a scrap of it—it's—well, it's so queer, so non-understandable. What does God want to take anybody like Pietje for, when he was so clever, and so young, and so full of life? I don't know—I hope He does—I expect He does. Perhaps I shall understand—some day. It's done, now, and not even God can undo it. Don't think I'm not reverent—I don't mean to be irreverent. And I'm not trying to talk cheap philosophy, either—I'm just facing things."

"What are you going to do, Linda?" asked Garrendon, thinking it might be well to divert her mind to practical matters.

"You won't stay in Rome, Linda?" asked Mary, somewhat foolishly, but because of sheer anxiety that Linda should get away.

"Oh, no, I shall not stay in Rome," she answered. "I should be just as near Pietje in

New York as I should here. And I don't want to go back to Bruges—and yet, there's poor Monsieur Verbeke. I don't know what I shall do—yet.”

“Come back with us to England,” said Garrendon.

“To England?” she said, thoughtfully.

“You would have friends with you there,” he said with emphasis.

“Yes, I should have friends. Thank you—I will think about it. It is well, isn't it, that I have so many things to think about? I must certainly think about Monsieur Verbeke. And now I am going to bed; don't be afraid, either of you, that I sha'n't sleep: I shall, because I'm utterly exhausted in every way.”

When they were alone, the brother and sister looked at each other, he with questioning, she with miserable eyes.

“John, do you think she'll break down?” asked Mary.

“No,” he answered. “She'll not break down. She's made of too good stuff for that.”

“But isn't it unnatural that she should show such calmness, such wonderful control?”

“Not in her case. She will mourn for that boy as long as ever she lives, but she'll never

show the outside world more than this," he replied. "You must remember that it's only mean and base natures that make a great outcry ; great souls suffer in silence."

Mary sighed.

"I never heard of such a tragedy in all my life !" she said. "If you only knew !"

"I want to know everything," he replied. "Beyond the little you told me on our way from the station I know nothing. Tell me all, Mary."

She hesitated a moment, turning the rings on her fingers round and round as if she were endeavouring to find in them a suggestion.

"John," she said suddenly, "the Marquis of Albaccina is Adrian Darrell.

To her surprise Garrendon showed no sign of astonishment. He nodded his head. Mary stared at him.

"You surely don't mean to say that you knew that ?" she exclaimed.

"No," he replied, "I certainly didn't know it, but I suspected it—I'll tell you why afterwards. Well—has she seen him—have they met ?"

"Yes."

"Tell me," he said.

"He was away from Rome—in Florence—when we arrived," she went on, slowly. "After

Pietje's accident yesterday morning they telegraphed for him—he got back late last night. I, too, but only since coming to Rome, had formed the very strongest suspicion—no, it was more than that, it was certainty—that Adrian Darrell and the Marquis were identical (I'll tell you all about it later) and I had been agonised at the thought of their meeting, because he has been married some years. Last night Linda asked the Marchesa to send him to her in Pietje's room, where she was watching the poor boy—she wanted to thank him for his kindness to Pietje in Pietje's presence. I thought I should choke when the Marchesa promised to do so. Fancy those two meeting in that way after all those years ! ”

“ Well ? ” said Garrendon.

“ I just caught a glimpse of him on his arrival,” continued Mary. “ He passed through a room in which I was sitting with the Marchesa's sisters. I knew him instantly in spite of the time which has elapsed since we saw him. He has a beard now, and looks, of course, older, but no one who knew him in those days could fail to recognise him. He did not look at me. A few minutes after he had passed through the room he passed back again looking very much distressed. Then

the Marchesa came and told me that Linda had fainted. When we had brought her round she begged me to bring her back here. That's all—they were together in the dead boy's room perhaps three minutes."

"Has she mentioned him to you?" asked Garrendon.

"Not one word. She would have no one at the funeral but herself and me, but she has not spoken to me of him once."

"No, and she never will!" said Garrendon, emphatically. "Nor to me, either, nor to Monsieur Verbeke—she'll never speak of him to human being. She would talk freely enough of him when she thought she had lost him for ever—now that she knows he's alive and has met him she'll never mention him again as long as she lives!"

"Whatever will happen?" exclaimed Mary.

But Garrendon shook his head. He was too sensible to make guesses at the future.

XI

MARY GARRENDON had not believed Linda's assertion that she would sleep, and during that night she had gone more than once to Linda's door to listen for sounds of wakefulness. With all her experience of life she had not yet learnt that nothing makes one sleep so soundly as the utter exhaustion of mind. The man who has followed hounds all day long over a stiff country sleeps; the man who has been leather-hunting for a whole afternoon when the wicket was good and the bowlers mere rotters sleeps;—but nobody sleeps as sleep those whose souls are worn out with sorrow. John Garrendon, being something of an observer of human life and a physician also, knew this and was not surprised when Linda met him and his sister next morning and informed them, with what Mary could scarcely avoid feeling to be a sort of *sang-froid*, that she had slept like a top. Nor was he surprised, either, that she took her coffee and ate her rolls with her usual normal appetite.

As for Mary, it was all that she could do to swallow a single mouthful, and she complained of the coffee.

"Throw it away on the grass, then," said Linda (they were taking their coffee late, and in the garden) "and tell them to make some fresh. Mine's all right—I don't taste the least difference between this coffee and the coffee we had yesterday morning and the morning before that. You're getting faddy, Mary."

Then Mary, feeling that if she tried either to say another word, or to eat another crumb of the roll which she had already broken into a thousand crumbs, she would burst into tears, made an excuse to go across the garden into the hotel, and promptly went, in something of a zigzaggy line. Linda, watching her with wide-open, speculative eyes, turned to Garrendon and said:

"What *is* the matter with Mary this morning? The coffee *is* all right, isn't it?"

"It might be heaps worse, and it might be a very little better," he answered. And finishing what was left in his cup he went on, "Mary's troubled, Linda—about you. Don't you see? She doesn't quite understand how you can. . . ."

"How I can talk about throwing the coffee away? I know. Do you think I don't know?"

"No—I don't think you don't know. I know that you do know."

She helped herself to another roll, and to a large twisted lump of butter and gazed with an almost sleepy meditation at a marble Faun upon whose silvery shoulders the slowly mounting sun was just then shining.

"I know what Mary means," she said. "She thinks I'm . . . mad."

"No, she doesn't," he retorted, keeping his eyes fixed steadily on hers. "She thinks you're—broken-hearted."

She let the knobby piece of roll, liberally plastered with butter, which she was just going to put into her mouth, drop on her plate, and turned to him with a look of astonishment.

"Think!" she exclaimed. "You don't mean to say that she only *thinks* that? Why, of course, my heart's broken. I don't even feel as if I'd ever had a heart. Broken-hearted! Oh! . . ."

"Don't, Linda!"

She laid a hand on his arm.

"No . . ." she said quietly. "It's just here, John. All those years—years of waiting—I got, somehow, to understand things—things that I can't realise even now. When

I say that my heart's broken, I mean that it's . . ."

She stopped and looked searchingly at him.

"I don't think I *do* know what I mean," she said, "and I'm perfectly sure that if I did know, *you* wouldn't know."

"Are you sure of that, Linda?" he said, gently.

She picked up the knobby bit of roll and ate it, meanwhile gazing straight in front of her.

"I don't know whether I ought to have said that, or whether I ought not to have said it," she answered. "I've heard people say that a woman can't reason—that she's only got instinct. I'm only a woman. But, you see——"

"Yes?" he said.

She threw the crumbs which Mary had steadily accumulated to the small birds hopping about the grass.

"You see," she went on, "you see, I've suffered all my life through the mere fact that I've such a heartful of Love to give to Something. I suppose some women are born like that—it's all Give. Now, if I speak for one moment about my boy, don't be afraid. I sha'n't make a scene for you or anybody. But, oh—if you just knew how I loved him—idolised him—worshipped him—made him my little God, , , ."

A bell in one of the neighbouring churches began to toll. She became silent, listened, remained silent for a while. Then she turned to Garrendon with a quick flash of her dark eyes.

"The sound of that bell brought something back to me," she said. "Once, in Bruges, when Pietje was just nine months old—such a pink-and-white, fat, sturdy little baby (I'm *not* going to cry, John!—I haven't a tear anywhere about me) I remember going into Notre Dame, just by my house, and hearing a friar (I don't know where he came from or who he was) preaching about—no, it wasn't the sinfulness; he never said it was sinful—but the—well, of course, I'm neither Catholic nor theologian, and I can't explain—but the putting of even what's dearest to you on earth before the highest that's in heaven. And what did I know, then, of what—why, what was anything? But . . ."

She paused for a long time. Garrendon waited.

"Yes, Linda?" he said at last.

She seemed to rouse herself out of a dream.

"I don't know—I don't know!" she said.

"I've been crying, starving for Love all my life. I gave mine—once. And . . ."

For the first time since he had seen her he saw

her head droop. She lifted her hands, covered her face.

"I've never yet been able to give it to what it really wants!" she said. "You see . . . you see . . . I *had* my boy . . . but now . . . now . . ."

Garrendon, moved out of his self-control, rose from his seat, laid his hand on her shoulder.

"Linda!" he said.

A step on the path near them. Garrendon looked up—Linda looked up—Monsieur Verbeke—a pathetic, wearied old man, with worlds of love and pity in his sad, benignant eyes, preceded by an obsequious waiter, was coming towards them.

XII

MONSIEUR VERBEKE desired to see Madame Van der Huysen alone. As he took the easy chair which she found for him and sank into it with a heavy sigh she thought he looked very old and feeble, and more than ever like some old ecclesiastic who would be glad to go to his long rest. His poor, long neck, always thin and bird-like, had grown scraggy; his great nose was now a notable projection from between his thin cheeks; his chin and his hands trembled, and his eyes were lack-lustre and red with weeping. Linda laid her hand on his arm.

"You look very tired this morning, Monsieur Verbeke," she said, sympathetically. "You have not walked across the city?"

Monsieur patted the hand which lay on his arm and tried to look better.

"No, no, my child," he answered. "No—I rode in one of the carriages. But I am naturally much upset and in great sorrow: Yet what is

my sorrow to yours, poor mother ! ” he concluded with fresh tears coming into his child-like blue eyes. “ Ah, my God, my God—what troubles dost Thou visit us with—yet all for our good, our good.”

“ Then we will try to bear them bravely.” said Linda. And she stooped and kissed the withered old cheek affectionately.

“ Thank you, my child,” said Monsieur Verbeke with his usual simplicity of manner. “ Yes, that is right—we must bear with what fortitude we can whatever is sent us—it is God’s will—God’s will.”

“ I am glad you came to see me, Monsieur Verbeke,” said Linda. “ I was wanting you.”

Monsieur Verbeke nodded.

“ Yes,” he said, “ of course I meant to come this morning—naturally. But I have brought you some messages—from the Marquis and his wife. They are safely put away in my old wallet—I did not carry them in my hand because I was so afraid of losing them. There, my dear—they are quite safe, are they not ?—I cannot see which is which because I forgot to bring out my spectacles.”

“ Quite safe, Monsieur Verbeke,” she answered, taking the two letters which he produced from

a thick-worn leather pocket-book, and turning them over. The handwriting of one—a man's—she knew now; the other, a woman's, she took to be the Marchesa's.

"Each gave those letters to me personally, with strict injunctions to give them into your hands alone," said Monsieur Verbeke. "Oh, they are very kind people—very kind people indeed!"

Linda had already observed that the letter from the Marquis was one of some bulk—the envelope appeared to contain a considerable number of sheets of notepaper. She laid it aside and turned to the other.

"Excuse me a moment, Monsieur Verbeke," she said, "and I will read what the Marchesa says to me."

"Oh, yes, yes, to be sure," said the old man. "Take your time, Madame Van der Huysen, take your time. An old fellow like me finds little use for time."

Then he sighed, remembering that now his chief occupation was gone. Well, he himself would be going soon. Let him see Bruges again, and die amongst his favourite books and scenes, and he would not mind very much how soon the summons came.

While Monsieur Verbeke was thus musing, Linda was reading the letter from the Marchesa. It was a kind, womanly letter, all the more appealing to Linda because it kept in reserve the sympathy which breathed through it. She did not wish, the writer said, to intrude during the first days of Linda's grief, especially as she knew that she had closer friends with her. But she wished to call upon her as soon as it should be Linda's wish, and so, she felt sure, did the Marquis, her husband, who, since his return had been overcome with grief. She went on to say how she and her husband had admired the dead boy and had formed such an affection for him, and how the Marquis had often spoken of him to her before Pietje's coming to Rome. It was a good letter and a kind one, and Linda put it aside with the one she had not yet opened.

"Monsieur Verbeke," she said, "I do not feel equal to writing letters—will it be a trouble to you to be charged with a message to the Marchesa—not a long one?"

"Oh, indeed no, Madame Van der Huysen! For an old fellow, my memory is remarkably good. Tell it to me and I shall repeat it word for word."

"Never mind that, so long as you give the

meaning. [Tell the Marchesa then, Monsieur Verbeke, that I thank her most gratefully for her letter, for its kind spirit, and for all her goodness to my poor boy and to me. You will remember all that ? ”

“ Surely, surely, Madame—I will remember it all.”

“ Tell her also that at present we may not meet—that perhaps we never may meet, because there will be a new life for me now. Say to her that whether we ever do meet or not I will pray for her.”

“ Yes, Madame,” said Monsieur Verbeke, bowing his head.

“ That is all—do not forget any of it, Monsieur Verbeke.”

“ Madame may depend upon my fidelity. But, Madame Van der Huysen, is there no message for the Marquis, then ? ”

Linda hesitated before replying. At last she rose.

“ Remain here a little while, Monsieur Verbeke,” she said. “ I will give you something for the Marquis. While I am getting it ready I shall send you some refreshment—you look cold.”

“ You are always very considerate to me,

Madamé Van der Huysen," said Monsieur Verbeke bowing his head. "I thank you."

Linda carried her two letters up to her own room. The Marchesa's letter she at once locked up in her travelling desk; the other she poised in her hand for some time, as if she were estimating its weight. She turned it over and over, gazing at the handwriting, at the great seal, stamped with armorial bearings, at the back—what did it contain—what had he to say to her?

She presently put this letter away with the other one. Unlocking a trunk, she took from it the dressing-case which Adrian Darrell had left behind him at Morcarstoft, and from this the miniature which she had found in it and to which Pietje had eventually come to bear such a resemblance. She looked at it steadily for some time; then from another part of the trunk she drew out a small packet which contained a miniature of Pietje executed in Bruges only a few weeks before. She set the two together and gazed at them with tearless eyes, marvelling at the extraordinary resemblance. They might have been twin-brothers.

Then she made these two miniatures into a neat packet, and sealed it, and went down to Monsieur Verbeke and placed it in his hands.

“Monsieur Verbeke, give this to the Marquis yourself. There is no other message than that It is something—of Pietje, which he will like to have.”

Monsieur Verbeke placed the packet inside the breast of his cassock-like surtout.

“Do you mean to stay in Rome much longer, Monsieur Verbeke?” she asked.

The old man fumbled his old-fashioned hat and shook his head.

“Ah, Madame Van der Huysen, I am longing to be home again, now!” he said pathetically.

“Yes, indeed—it is best for me. But such kind hosts—would it seem ungracious?”

“They will understand. Make your adieux to them to-day, and come here, and to-morrow we will all journey back together—you and Dr. and Miss Garrendon, and I. And if—if either the Marquis or the Marchesa should think of—of coming—say farewell, ask them not to do so, Monsieur Verbeke. We may meet again—some day.”

Monsieur Verbeke promised to remember everything

XIII

FOR some time after Monsieur Verbeke had gone away Linda remained in deep thought. Mary Garrendon, entering the room very quietly, saw that she was pre-occupied, and went away as softly as she had come. Linda neither saw nor heard her enter and leave.

What revelation lay hidden in that letter, now safely locked up in her room, which Monsieur Verbeke had carried to her?—what explanation of those long years of silence, during which she had believed, trusted, hoped, and finally, when hope was dead, cherished the memory of her child's father? She looked back upon them as she sat there, and saw them all in order, in detail; she remembered everything of her thoughts and feelings while they passed away in this slow sequence, bringing—nothing. And at last she raised her eyes, and glanced about the room, and through the windows as if she were looking for something to speak to, and she spoke, in a whisper.

"I don't want to open it—I don't want to read it!" she said.

She realised vaguely as she said this that she was clinging to her belief in Darrell. She did not want to open the letter, and find a confession of faithlessness, however bitterly he might repent that faithlessness now. She did not want to read anything which might suggest deceit—far better to keep the silence, live in the mystery which had existed all those years.

"Besides, it's all over," she murmured, again looking about the room. "It's been all over ever so long, if I'd only known it."

Yet, being a woman, she knew there was the explanation of some mystery in that letter; woman-like, too, she was secretly inquisitive about it. And while one side of her dreaded to hear any explanation that would tend to destroy old ideals, the other ached to know if there were not some explanation which would tend to preserve them, untainted. So she sat, undecided, for some time, and at last went to her room and took out the letter and looked at it.

Two questions came into her mind.

Ought she not, in common fairness to the writer, to read what had been written?

If she did, what effect would it have on past and future ?

She suddenly put the letter in her pocket. The old frown of determination came into her face and eyes.

"No, Adrian," she said, as if she were addressing the man who was in her thoughts, "I won't hear you. It's all over—and I want to think of you as just the same . . . always."

Then she went away to find the Garrendons and asked them to go out with her and an interpreter, whom she instructed to take them to the best monumental sculptor in Rome. She wanted, she said, to have a stone erected over the boy's grave before leaving the city—no doubt they would be able to find something of the sort she had in mind.

At the sculptor's she found a simple, slender shaft of white marble, graceful as a pine-tree, on the capital of which rested the figure of a dove with outstretched wings. On the plinth of this she bade the sculptor to carve one word—*Pledge*—and made him promise to have this done and to meet her at the cemetery with the shaft at a certain hour that afternoon.

At her own request she went to the cemetery alone, and superintended the erection of the

shaft. When the men had made the necessary excavation for its reception, she sent them away for awhile, and kneeling down placed the letter in it and covered it over with soil. Then she saw the shaft duly set and cemented, and after remaining a little time alone by the grave went away, feeling as if she had said farewell to all that she had ever possessed.

But there was still Monsieur Verbeke to look after, and all the way home to Bruges she took as much care of him as if he had been her father.

XIV

THOSE who knew her in Bruges wondered at Linda's strange fortitude under the sudden and awful blow which had befallen her. If she had sunk into melancholy or become apathetic; if she had shown signs of occasional outbursts of grief, no one would have been surprised—on the contrary they would have thought any of these things natural and quite to be expected. But Linda's dominant note was a patient cheerfulness at which everybody marvelled. It had seemed to her when the blow first fell that she could never bear to set foot in Bruges again: the nearer she drew to the old city the more she realised that there was work for her to do there, and that in that work she would find peace.

That work, of course, was Monsieur Verbeke.

The old tutor had aged greatly during those distressing days in Rome. He looked twenty years older when he got back to Bruges than

when he set out from it only a fortnight before, and John Garrendon remarked to his sister that he was beginning to break up.

"That," said Mary, "will mean that Linda will stay here in Bruges as long as he lives. And will that be good for her?"

"It will be good for her so long as she has him to attend to and take care of," he replied. "She has a wonderful power of concentrating herself upon anything, and she will concentrate herself upon Monsieur Verbeke. But after that . . ."

He said no more on this point, but Mary knew exactly what was in his mind. He wanted Linda to watch over the old tutor until the end came, but after that he wanted her to come to them in Yorkshire. And the night before the brother and sister left for England, three weeks after the return from Rome, Mary broached that subject to Linda when they were alone together.

"You are going to stay in Bruges awhile, Linda?" she said.

"I shall stay as long as I can do anything for Monsieur Verbeke," replied Linda.

"And after that?"

Linda shook her head and said nothing. She did not look unhappy, but merely undecided.

"You would not think of staying here, alone?" said Mary.

"I do not know what I shall do, after—after Monsieur Verbeke doesn't want me any more," answered Linda. "Perhaps I may find somebody else who wants me."

Mary laid her hand on Linda's arm.

"You know that we always want you, John and I," she said. "Come to us, Linda."

Linda stared at her.

"Of course I know that you want me," she said, "but I couldn't come to you for always, Mary."

"And why not?"

"Because I must do something—I must work. Do you think I am going to live in idleness all my life just because I have had heavy sorrows? I am not."

Mary sighed deeply.

"I wish you would marry John, Linda," she said, somewhat irrelevantly. "You know very well how he cares for you, and how true he has been to you all these years, and how——"

Linda lifted an appealing hand.

"Don't, Mary!" she said. "It hurts—just now. Besides, John and I understand each other on that point."

"Whether you understand each other or not," said Mary, "I know that he never changes towards you. You have a great friendship and affection for him—why not marry him? You are only a young woman yet, after all, and you have a right to years of happiness with a good man at your side—and John is a good man," concluded John's sister, with sisterly warmth.

Linda sighed deeply.

"Yes," she said, "I know that—no one better. But don't talk about it any more, Mary—it hurts just now. And at present I shall not think of anything but Monsieur Verbeke. If I thought he would really like it I would have him moved here, so that I could keep a constant eye on him, but he has become so attached to his rooms across the way there that it would make him most miserable to leave them. But I shall spend all the time I can with him, read to him, take him out, and cheer him up."

"And when you can do no more for him," said Mary again, "promise me that you'll come to us—even if it's only for a time."

"Yes," answered Linda, "I will promise that."

And, Mary leaving her then, she began to wonder what it would be like to see Morcarstoft and the old places, the well-remembered villages

and the level land again. She was conscious, as she thought of it, that a visit to the familiar scenes would not hurt her now as it would have hurt her years before, even months before. The great chapter of her life was closed and was now to be, not forgotten, but regarded with a brave acquiescence.

"After all, I have my poor Monsieur Verbeke to think for," she said to herself.

There are those in Bruges who can tell you of the devotion which the young widow Van der Huysen gave to that old Monsieur Verbeke who had been tutor to the poor Pietje who met his death in so deplorable a manner. How she was with him every day during those last months of the good old gentleman's life. How he and she were more like father and daughter than aught else. How she used to read to him; take him out for drives into the country on the sunny days; walk by his side when he was wheeled to Mass in his invalid chair—a present from herself—wait on him hand and foot.

There are folk, too, who can tell you how the time which she did not spend with Monsieur Verbeke was spent amongst the poorest quarters of the city. How she found out the sick and needy, especially amongst the children, and

gave them her spare time, her help, her money, and was seemingly never wearied. How she besought the clergy who came to visit the old tutor to tell her of cases of want and poverty. How, always known since her first coming, for a generous-hearted woman, she came to be regarded amongst the poor as something between a saint and an angel.

These stories came to the ears of Monsieur Verbeke—retailed to him by some of his clerical friends when they happened to catch him alone. Monsieur Verbeke beamed when he heard them—this woman, for whom he had such a profound veneration, was drawing nearer and nearer to something, which he had long, in secret, desired for her.

“What will you do, my child,” he said to her one day, half-playfully, as she sat by his invalid chair in the Béguinage, “when you no longer have a poor old fellow to look after and care for?”

She glanced at him quickly and laid her hand on his.

“You are not gone yet, Monsieur Verbeke,” she said, “and it seems to me that the more one sees of life and the world the more one finds people who need help.”

“Of a truth,” said Monsieur Verbeke, “there

are a great many more poor people in this world than one would at first suppose."

"And therefore," said Linda, "it is not what I shall do when I have not you to look after, but how I shall find time to do all that I might do for those for whom something should be done?"

Then, after a little silence, she said in a very low voice :

"If it is any consolation to you, Monsieur Verbeke, to know it, I assure you that I shall never cease from doing what I can. It has been my salvation."

XV

YET in spite of all her courage and of her ceaseless labours there were times when the woman in Linda asserted herself and she found it a difficult matter to avoid the breakdown which she had so steadily set her will against. She had refused to make the slightest alteration in the arrangements of her house, and in that house one could scarcely turn anywhere without coming across something that had belonged to the dead boy. There were such commonplace matters as hats, caps, coats, sticks of his; there were books; there were two or three violins and as many fishing-rods. Worst of all there was his sitting-room, a perfect wilderness, and his bedroom—empty and silent of him. She left everything as it was, not from any desire of self-torture, but because something within her forbade her to touch anything or make any alteration. Sometimes she caught herself listening for Pietje's step, his voice, and turned cold and numb when

recognition of the reality succeeded this trick of the fancy. And once meeting Madame Regnier and Adèle in the street she was obliged to turn round and hurry away lest an encounter with the child should cause her to break down in a passion of tears.

Only once during the many days which she and Monsieur Verbeke spent together did the old tutor see her give way. Having been out by himself one day he came into his little book-lined *salon* to find her crying bitterly. On her knee lay a picture which Monsieur Verbeke instantly recognised as a caricature of himself which Pietje had once made and presented him with in a spirit of boyish mischief when the three of them were out together on one of their little excursions. Linda had been tidying one of the old tutor's paper-strewn tables and had come across it, and it had touched something in her which other things had not touched. And now she was sobbing as if she were inconsolable.

The old man went up and laid his hand on her bowed head.

"Courage, my child!" he said. "Trust in God."

She made an effort, and her sobbing became less violent.

“ Ah, if I only knew why God took him away from me ! ” she said.

“ For a good reason, without doubt, my child.”

“ But I do not understand,” she said. “ And—he was all I had—all ! ”

Monsieur Verbeke laid his hand on her head again.

“ God can give you a thousand-fold more than that, my daughter,” he said gently. And he put a crucifix into her hands.

Then he went quietly away and left her alone.

XVI

Just a year after their return from Rome Monsieur Verbeke died, and was duly laid to his last rest in the family vault in St. Jacques, his native parish, and within a month of his death Linda had sold all her belongings in Bruges, given the proceeds of the sale to the poor, and gone back to Yorkshire.

The Garrendons received her joyfully, taking no pains to conceal their delight that she was with them at last. It seemed to them that beyond the fact that she was graver and quieter and less assertive, she was still the Linda of the days before the troublous times began.

To her nothing seemed to have changed in any way. The doctor's house was just the same, and everything within it was ordered in exactly as when she used to go there as a girl. Garrendon went out on his rounds, and came in from his rounds, and in the evenings his slippers were

always warming at the fire. There was even the same maid-servant in the kitchen.

Nor was there any change in Morcarstoft, except that the old house was now tenanted by folk who had come from another part of the county. Linda gazed at it, and at its garden, its orchard, its outbuildings, with wistful eyes, but made no attempt to enter it. She remembered it as it had been, with its old furniture, old silver, old china, old delf-ware, and had no mind to see it changed. Watching the blue smoke curling out of its quaint chimneys to the autumn sky, it seemed to her that it would be the least surprising thing in the world if she walked up the garden path, opened the porch door and found her father and Darrell sitting by the fire in the stone hall, smoking their pipes.

She went into the coppice where she and Darrell had gone nutting—the fallen tree on which she had sat down after they had gathered the first basketful was still there, and looked just the same. She sat down on it again, and remembered everything that was said, and that she was wearing a smart jacket which he had praised. There were some dried and rattling nuts left on the hazels—she gathered a handful of them and put them in her pocket.

The folk round about knew her at once and saw little change in her. They addressed her after the old fashion and seemed unable to comprehend that so many years had elapsed since they had seen her.

"Well, now, if that theer isn't Miss Vandy Lindy!" exclaimed one old dame, at whose cottage door she knocked one afternoon. "Come your ways in, miss, and tak' a seat by the hearth-stone. Deary-me-to-day! An' you lookin' scarce a day older nor you was when I last set eyes on you. An' you've been livin' i' forrin parts, miss, and lost your husban' and your little boy, I did hear tell—dear, dear!"

"Yes, Mrs. Grimes," answered Linda.

"Well, theer is a mort o' trouble i' this weary world," said Mrs. Grimes, philosophically. "An' sure I am that I don't know whether it isn't best to have your troubles—for have 'em you will, certain sure, some time or other—when you're young and strong nor to have 'em when you're old and haven't over much strength to abide 'em. Now, our Thomas, as you'll remember, Miss Lindy, for he worked for your father all his life, he didn't depart to Abraham's bowsom as they term it, until he were five-and-sixty and me a year owder, and that's three year ago, and sin'

then it's been a vale o' tears for me, for he were a strong hearty man for his years, and earnin' his sixteen shillin' a week. And then our Emma Mary went and died a year after her poor father, and so theer's nobbut me left, 'ceptin' our Robert, and as he went away to America when he were a lad he might as well be i' t' Good Place, if it weren't 'at he sends me a bit o' money every month. And so, as I say, happen it's just as well 'at you should have had your bits o' troubles while you're young, Miss Lindy."

"Perhaps it is, Mrs. Grimes," agreed Linda.

"Why, of course, it's th' Lord's will, as the preycher says," said Mrs. Grimes, with a shrug of her shoulders which was meant to express the highest form of faith and resignation, "and besides, a handsome young lady like you, 'at's little more nor a gel yet'll soon have plenty o' young gentlemen to pick and choose amongst. Oh, dear me, yes! Lor' bless you, a body's down one minute i' this world, but it's high up agen the next."

These folk soon began to hope that Cornelius Van de Linde's daughter, now that she had come home again, would stop amongst them. Like all country coteries their fixed opinion was that where one is born there one should remain it

was a sacred duty to one's ancestors and to one's native soil to stop where Providence had set one down. But they had a further reason for desiring Linda's presence in their midst. They knew that Cornelius had died a very wealthy man, and that his daughter had inherited every penny he had: they knew also, for news slips through every possible crevice in rural communities, that Linda was a rich woman. There was still another reason why she should be kept amongst them—during her visit to the Garrendons they had discovered that she was extraordinarily generous with her money, and that such comfortable matters as tea, tobacco, blankets, coal, flannel petticoats, and stray half-crowns came from her bounty as readily as nuts from well-filled boughs.

It was the general desire of the countryside that she should marry Dr. Garrendon and settle here amongst her own people. And the general desire was of course very soon transformed into general rumour, and general rumour into particular rumour, and particular rumour into that species of information which one may call Know-it-for-a-fact. Garrendon heard of this and fumed as fiercely as at the rumours of fourteen years before. Then he went home and told

Linda of what was being said and ended up by asking her, for the tenth time, to marry him. And this time he urged his suit with some passion.

She listened to him quietly and with a certain wistful expression on her face which he had never seen there before. But when he had said all that he could think of she shook her head sadly.

"It's no good, John," she said. "I'm very, very sorry, but I can never marry anybody."

He uttered an impatient exclamation. She stopped him with a look.

"No, don't do that," she said. "It's unlike your best self—your patience."

"A man can't be patient for ever," he said.

"But remember, I told you from the first," she said. "I always told you that I should never marry as long as I lived—that I had a certain ideal of constancy and that I meant, through thick and thin, to keep strictly true to it. I am not going to break the promise I made to myself now."

"But Linda," he pleaded, "just consider——"

"Let me tell you something," she said, interrupting him. "Perhaps you will understand things better when I do—and I want you

to understand. Do you know that the Marquis of Albaccina is Adrian Darrell ? ”

“ Yes,” replied Garrendon abruptly, “ I do ! ”

“ You do ? ”

“ I do—I suspected it when he wrote to you in Bruges.”

“ Why ? ”

He explained his reasons to her in a few words.

“ And does Mary know ? ” she inquired when he had finished.

“ She does—she found it out as soon as you and she got to Rome, and she also saw and recognised him.”

Linda regarded him steadily for some moments without speaking.

“ And you know nothing more than that ? ” she asked.

“ How could we ! ” he exclaimed. “ Who was there to tell us ? ”

She laid her hand on his arm.

“ Listen,” she said, “ I want to tell you something. You may tell Mary of it afterwards. I had not the faintest notion of the truth until—until he came to me in Pietje’s room. You can conceive what a shock it was—that was the only time I ever fainted in my life. I said nothing to any one—neither to you nor Mary

nor to poor old Monsieur Verbeke—of what I had discovered. The day after Pietje was buried Monsieur Verbeke brought me two letters—one, a short, kind note from the Marchesa, which I read at once; the other, a bulky letter from the Marquis. Something told me that that letter contained the explanation of what had been a mystery so long to all of us.”

She paused and seemed to consider things for awhile. Garrendon waited, watching her.

“I never opened that letter,” she said at last. “I buried it, unopened, under the marble shaft which we chose for Pietje’s grave. Do you know—can you guess why I did that?”

Garrendon shook his head.

“It was the crowning proof of my loyalty to Pietje’s father,” she said. “I felt this—that I had been constant to him through much trouble and sorrow all those years and that even then, knowing what I did, I wished to keep my faith in him. You see, I knew that he knew how constant I had been—now, I did not want any explanation of anything from him at all; I just wanted to go on believing. And I shall go on like that to the end.”

“But in the face of—” began Garrendon.

She stopped him with a quick glance.

"In the face of what?" she asked. "Things as they are, you mean? I don't know. I don't want to know. All I want to know, and mean to know is this—I gave him my love once for all and it's his for ever. I've been consistent, at any rate."

Garrendon sighed. He took a few steps about the garden, in which they had been talking, and at last came back and stood before her and searched her very soul. She bore his inspection unflinchingly.

"You'll never depart from that?" he said in a low voice.

"Never!" she said.

"And yet—he is married to another woman!"

Linda made no reply, beyond bowing her head.

"You may never see him again," said Garrendon.

She lifted her eyes and gazed at him in astonishment.

"I never expect to!" she exclaimed. "If I thought that I should—I mean if I knew that I was going to I would take great care that I didn't!"

"A great many people," continued Garrendon, "would say that he had wronged you deeply."

"What do I care what a great many people

—most people—would say ! ” she retorted with a flash of the old spirit. “ Am I to change my opinion—the vital feeling which is Me—in this matter, because of what other people may say ? Don’t let’s speak any more of this, John. I shall be true to him all my life.”

“ You’re a great woman,” said Garrendon, after a pause.

She shook her head impatiently.

“ No,” she said, “ I’m nothing of the sort, John. But I’ve tried very hard to be a truthful one. And I mean to be true to my own feelings and instincts.”

“ What are you going to do, Linda ? ” he asked.

“ Yes, I wanted to tell you about that, and to tell Mary, too,” she said. “ I must have plenty of occupation—lots to do. And so I am going on with my work amongst the poor people.”

“ In Bruges ? ”

She shook her head, and smiled sadly.

“ No, there are too many ghosts in Bruges,” she said. “ It was bearable while poor Monsieur Verbeke lived, but afterwards—oh, no, I couldn’t have stayed longer in Bruges, John.”

“ Where, then ? ”

“ In the East End of London. I met a woman

in Bruges last year who told me of the poverty there is in the East End, and of what any one—a woman, I mean, who is strong and healthy and has some means of her own—could do amongst the people there. And so very soon I am going there, and after finding out where I shall be best employed I shall take a house in the district and set to work to see what I can do. I couldn't do anything better."

"Well—God bless you!" said Garrendon, after a long pause.

He knew that that was the farewell word between them. As he had always told his sister and himself, Linda was not for him.

Two weeks later she left them and was presently one amidst the seething millions of London.

XVII

Two years after that, Mary Garrendon, writing to her brother from the house of a friend with whom she was then staying in London, sent him this news of the woman with whose life they had both been so intimately concerned :

“ I have been to see Linda to-day, and spent several hours with her. The house—a big, roomy, old-fashioned one, almost in decay when she took it, but now modernised and fitted up in a proper way for her work and purposes, is in one of the most squalid parts of Hoxton—as poverty-stricken a district as I ever saw. Just at this time of the year, when so many of the men are out of work, the distress in neighbourhoods like this is awful to contemplate !—I thought as I walked through some of the streets and saw the despairing faces of half-starving men and women and the shivering forms of half-clad children, of how much better off the country

people about us are, however low their wages may be. Between the poverty that we are acquainted with, and poverty such as this, there is a difference which one can scarcely understand.

“ I very soon found that Linda was known in the district as the lady who looks after the babies. After studying this place in all its phases she came to the conclusion that no one wanted help so much as the very young children who couldn't help themselves. Her house, then, is in reality, a children's refuge—not a hospital, but a home. I should say that the majority of the babies in it are illegitimate. She has accommodation for fifty; she says that if she only had the means she could lay her hands on five hundred such children in twenty-four hours. They are brought to her from all parts—she has to send them away daily.

“ Everything is managed by herself—everything paid for by herself—as you know, she is spending every penny of her income on this work. She has a fine staff of nurses, and seems to have had a rare knack of picking out the right ones—young and strong women who are in thorough sympathy with her objects.

All the arrangements of the house are admirable—I don't suppose there is a single detail of its management which is not under her supervision. She is here, there, and everywhere at once.

“As for Linda herself, I have never seen her look so strong, nor so well, nor so bright. One of the nurses told me that she is at work from early in the morning till late at night—often half through the night—and that she is always cheerful, always smiling, always tireless. Apart from her work she has no other life. She took me into her room—it was as plain and simple as a nun's cell. There was nothing in it but the merest necessities—there was not even a carpet. As for ornaments—well, over the mantelpiece, on the whitewashed wall, there was a large photograph of Pietje's grave in the cemetery at Rome, and underneath it a little crucifix which she said Monsieur Verbeke gave her during that last year in Bruges.

“She walked through the streets with me to the omnibus—such a contrast in her strong, vigorous beauty—for she is just as handsome as ever—to the poor, white-faced, ill-fed people about. They all knew her—she

little night-work," he continued, after smoking thoughtfully awhile.

"All the same," said Mary, "you're not well. Something's bothering you."

"Yes," he said quietly, "I am bothered—that's true. I've—perhaps foolishly—been trying to look into the future—trying to guess at what may happen."

"The future? What may happen? Happen to whom?"

Garrendon blew a spiral curl of smoke away into the sun-charged air. He did not immediately reply.

"What is it, John?" said his sister.

Garrendon gathered up the reins again and shook the horse into a less leisurely rate of progress.

"Mary," he said, "do you know that the Marchesa is dead?"

Mary Garrendon, on hearing these words, felt all the sensations which the human mind can only experience when vast possibilities are revealed to it with startling suddenness. It was as if she had been sitting in some chamber in which there was a door beyond which anything or nothing might lay hidden, and as if a sudden opening of it had revealed a far-stretching and

unexplored country. Her brother's last four words, so simple in themselves, were charged with a terrible importance to her, and she could barely recognise their significance. And she could think of nothing more to say than the mere commonplace exclamation :

"John ! Are you sure ?"

"I saw it in the *Times*," answered Garrendon
"She died of malarial fever, in Rome, three weeks since."

Then they were both silent—and both thinking the same thought.

"I don't suppose that she knows," said Garrendon at last.

"Linda ? No—I'm sure she doesn't," replied Mary, with conviction. "She knows nothing of it—I could swear to that. How should she ?—she never sees the *Times*, and I doubt if she ever reads the newspapers at all—she's too busy. And if she did——"

"Well," said Garrendon as she paused.

"Do you think it would make any difference to her, John ? Any real difference ?"

Garrendon smoked moodily for a time before he answered her.

"Yes," he said, "I do. All the difference."

"In what way, and how ?" asked his sister.

Garrendon threw his cigar away with an ill-suppressed exclamation of impatience.

"I've been thinking it over," he said. "After all, human nature is human nature, and the most powerful thing in the world. You've got to remember that this man is the only man she's ever cared for, and that he was the father of her child. A woman never forgets her first lover, and she hasn't forgotten, and she never will forget. And now the man's free—free!"

Mary made no reply to this for some moments.

"You think he'll seek her out again?" she said at last.

"Yes."

"She is more than content where she is," said Mary. "She is happy."

Garrendon laughed—rather harshly.

"She would forget all that—if he came," he said.

But Mary shook her head.

"No, John," she said. "I think you're wrong. Linda has a very strong mind, and she can govern herself now in spite of her natural impulsiveness. She's learnt—lessons. She's perfectly happy in devoting herself to her charges—her heart's in it."

"The man is free," reiterated Garrendon.

As Mary made no reply to this, he continued speaking with a somewhat cynical air which was foreign to him.

"Linda's strong enough not to think of him when he wasn't free, but if she knew that he is free, she'd begin thinking about him to-morrow. You can't put human nature aside, Mary—it beats all of us in the end. You'll see."

"Are you going to tell Linda of what you read in the *Times*, then?" Mary inquired.

"No, I shall not tell her. He will seek her out. Their past history—the fact of the boy—their meeting in Rome under such circumstances—now the death of his wife and his consequent freedom—oh, he is sure to seek her in due time."

"You speak rather bitterly, John," said his sister, laying her hands on his arm.

Garrendon sighed.

"Perhaps I am a little bitter," he said. "I've been very true to the mere thought of her all these years, and God knows that I would have saved her from any sorrow. And I've had nothing—and this man will have all."

Mary shook her head.

"I don't think you know Linda, even yet," she said. "I believe that she's crushed all

that out of herself. However, she's coming to stay with us this harvest, and then you'll see what I mean—she has changed, in my opinion. And unless I am greatly mistaken in her this news would not make the least difference to her plans for the future."

But Garrendon shook his head.

"A woman never forgets her first lover," he said. "Never!"

XIX

WHEN Linda came down to spend the harvest weeks with them, Garrendon, who had not seen her for two years, watched her closely for signs of the change in her of which his sister had spoken. He saw little difference in her—to him she was very much the same Linda that he had always known. In spite of all the trouble which she had known she still retained much of her girlish brightness and vivacity, and it was evident to the doctor's practised eye that her life in the East End was having no injurious effect on her health. She came to him and Mary in good and cheerful spirits; she was full of conversation and laughter; it seemed to Garrendon that she had made up her mind long since to cultivate a courageous serenity of spirit and had succeeded in doing so. She never spoke of the past—all her thoughts seemed to be of her work in the present and the future. That she was happy in her self-appointed mission

Garrendon had no doubt ; that it had afforded her a means of consolation was equally certain. But he was not certain of what might not happen if the man she loved crossed her path again. He had no means of knowing whether she knew that Adrian was a free man, for she never by any chance spoke even to Mary of anything which had happened anterior to her return to England or of any person other than those with whom she was now intimately connected in her work. The doctor and his sister took this cue from this reticence and were careful to say nothing of the dead-and-gone past.

Linda entered into the spirit of the harvest month with zest. In spite of the vast changes made in the aspect of the harvest fields by the introduction of all manner of machinery there were still features of harvest life remaining which no inventor or invention could spoil. There were the great wheat-fields, golden-brown in hue, as level in their ocean-like expanses of heavy-laden ears as the unbroken landscape of which they made a portion. There were the barley-fields, fragrant as of old ; in barley-fields and wheat-fields there was all day the familiar rattle of the reaper. Then there was the dew of the harvest mornings, sparkling like diamonds

on hedgerow and thicket, and the hush of the harvest nights when tired men went to bed at half-past eight and the little windows of the cottages went lampless and candleless. With the harvest sights and scents came the autumnal colour and the autumnal feeling ; the nuts were ripening in the coppices and the woods were changing from green to gold and red. Linda drank all these things in as only those can who have seen little but brick and mortar, dreary streets and drearier squares for a long period.

She would have been something more than human, or less than natural, if at this time her thoughts had not sometimes gone back to the harvest-tide of the year in which Adrian Darrell came into her life. She remembered that particular harvest very well. It had been an early harvest, like this, beginning at the right end of August and finishing before September had arrived at its meridian. There had been an almost unbroken spell of fine weather ; the crops were uniformly excellent and Cornelius had gone to bed every night in a state of high content. Oh no !—she had forgotten nothing of that harvest nor of the fateful month which followed it. Little things brought all that time back to her with wonderful vividness—the

sight of men and horses amongst the wheat and oats; the scent of barley in field and stackgarth; a man gathering apples in a fruit-laden orchard; children going a-nutting amongst the hazels; geese being driven to the stubble.

And towards the end of her visit the harvest moon brought back memories still more vivid.

One night, Garrendon being out on a sick call to a neighbouring village and she and Mary having sat in silence for some time, one engaged in sewing, the other in knitting, Linda became possessed of a strange feeling of restlessness which could not be controlled or denied. She suddenly threw her sewing aside with an impatient exclamation. Mary looked up in some astonishment.

"What is it, Linda?" she asked.

"I don't know," said Linda. "I'm restless. I'll go out for a walk and work it off. I expect it's the result of five weeks of idleness—I must go back to my work, Mary."

"The nights are chilly," said Mary, disregarding all else.

"I will put a shawl round my shoulders. Besides, I never catch a cold."

"Shall I go with you, Linda?"

"No," answered Linda bluntly, "I'd rather

go alone. And don't be afraid if I seem to be out a long time—when I'm restless I like to do what I please."

Mary made no reply to this, and Linda, fetching a shawl from her room threw it carelessly round her shoulders and went out into the night. She drew a long breath of relief as she stepped into the road and met the scent of the land and the full glory of the silver moon.

"What's the matter with me?" she said to herself as she walked along the road. "I should have choked if I'd stayed a minute longer indoors. It's as if something was calling me—calling me to go somewhere."

Then she suddenly remembered that this was the anniversary of the night on which she and Adrian Darrell had watched the moonlight flood the stone hall. For a moment she stood, a swift spasm of pain, of recollection, darting through her; then she set out with quick strides in the direction of Morcarstoft.

Morcarstoft was at that time an empty house. Its tenant was dead, and his family gone; at Martinmas a new tenant was coming into it; in the meantime it was desolate and uninhabited. No smoke curled into the moonlighted night from its quaint chimneys when she came in

sight of them and the queer old windows showed no gleam of fire or lamp. All over the familiar old place hung an atmosphere of silence. The night was so clear, the moonlight so strong that she could see everything in garden and orchard and stackgarth almost as clearly as if it had been high noon. She saw her father's favourite apple-tree, well filled with fruit; she noticed that the garden was being kept in good order and that the stackgarth was filled to bursting with stacks of wheat and barley. Nothing was changed in the exterior aspect of the place; there was the old summer-house in which she had sat with Adrian the morning after his arrival; there the deep porch in which he had said farewell to her at his strangely hurried departure. But she knew that all else was gone and that all within the well-remembered house was as cold and desolate as its fireless hearth-stones.

A strange, compelling desire to walk through the familiar rooms again suddenly seized upon her. She passed through the garden gate and down the garden, and to her surprise found that the door of the porch was unlocked. A moment later she stood once more within the stone hall.

How still, how grave-like it was, this old home, bereft of all human life ! There was not a sound in it save that of her own footsteps. The very atmosphere was reminiscent of that of re-opened vaults lying beneath the pavements of old churches—cold, chilling. On the hearth of the stone hall, in her own time always so bright and cheery, lay the remains of a fire—some charred sticks, some grey cinders. In the glittering moonlight these 'things looked cheerless and disconsolate.

Linda had no nerves, and no sense of fear. She began to wander about the old house, re-peopleing every room and chamber she went into. She saw her father sitting on the long settle in the stone hall, smoking his pipe ; she saw him in his little office, casting up his accounts. She saw old Sarah sitting in her accustomed seat by the kitchen fire ; she saw every man and woman who had ever been in her father's employ within her recollection. There was not an inch of the old place which had not some memory for her.

She lingered a long time in the corridor upstairs, gazing out of its window at the moonlit landscape outside. She remembered that the moonlight had shone on the orchard and garden

on that eventful night now so many years ago just as it shone then ; that it had gilded the tops of the beech-trees opposite in just the same way. All seemed the same, so far as nature was concerned—the difference was with herself.

She went down into the stone hall again and stood in the full light of the moon to take a last look round. She was glad that she had entered the old house, she said to herself—it had been like seeing a very old friend under changed circumstances. She would never enter it again, though—as it was, empty, she could recreate its once familiar appearance and atmosphere, but when strangers came to it, it would lose its charm again. And——

She suddenly heard steps—a man's steps—coming up the garden path. Now they sounded on the pavement of the porch ; a hand tried the latch of the door. The door opened ; a man stepped into the stone hall, into the moonlight.

For the second time in that place Adrian Darrell and Linda Van de Linde looked into each other's eyes.

Linda felt her heart suddenly swell to bursting point. Standing there in the full light of the moon in a white dress and a white shawl thrown

carelessly about her head and shoulders, her dark hair and eyes making her face pale by contrast, she might have been a ghost, and the man uttered a sharp cry of surprise that was not far removed from fear. He pulled himself up quickly and drew nearer, breathing her name.

"Linda! Is it really you?"

Now that the first shock was over Linda's wits came back to her. She spoke quite calmly—almost indifferently.

"Yes," she said, "it is I. Did you think it was my—spirit?"

He was standing close to her, gazing intently at her—she saw that his face bore marks of recent trouble and that his dark hair was turning grey at the temples.

"I did not know what to think, at first," he said. "I had no thought of finding you here."

"I had no thought of your coming here," she replied. "There is nothing very extraordinary in my being here, because I am staying with the Garrendons, close by. But you——"

"I am travelling in England," he replied. "And on my way north I felt impelled to stop at Doncaster and to—come here again."

Linda moved over to the window and sat down on the broad seat on which he used to

place his colours and brushes during the time he was painting his picture of her.

"I don't see that any good could come of your coming here again," she said.

He made no answer to this, but presently sat down near her and, after looking at her in silence for a time, spoke.

"Do you know that I have been trying to find you?" he said. "I have been to Bruges and could learn nothing except that you had left there. No one seemed to know where you had gone."

"No," she said, "I did not wish any one to know. And I do not know why you wished to find me. I had no wish that you should find me—now."

"I felt it to be my duty to find you," he answered.

"Your—duty? I do not understand," she said quickly. "Your—duties—surely, are elsewhere."

He shook his head and, looking away from her, stared into the blackness on the further side of the stone hall.

"No," he said, "I have no duties—of that sort. I think you cannot be aware that my wife is dead—she died three months ago. I left Italy at once."

Linda made no answer. But presently she rose and walked rapidly about the stone hall, crossing and recrossing the shafts of moonlight. At last she came to his side and laid a hand on his shoulder. Looking up he recognised the great strength, the signs of endurance, which recent years had put into her face.

"Listen, Adrian," she said, using his name as readily as in the old days. "It would be wrong in me to say I'm sorry, except sorry for any sorrow you feel, or for her if she wanted to live. And when you say 'wife'—well, you see, in my opinion, strange as it may seem, your real and true wife is the woman who is speaking to you. I think God would say so."

There was a long silence. She stood by him, looking down on his bowed head. He made no attempt to face her.

"Linda," he said at last, "why did you not answer the long letter which I sent to you in Rome by Monsieur Verbeke?"

"Because I never read it," she replied. "I buried it—unopened—under the stone which I put over the boy's grave."

"But why?"

"Because," she said slowly, "because I feared that it might contain something which

would cause me to alter my conception of you—and having been faithful to that conception all those years I didn't want to lose it. I preferred to——”

“To think of me as an ideal!” he exclaimed, with some trace of bitterness. “To believe me something better than I was and am.”

“No, I don't think so,” she answered. “But I believed in you at first and I wanted to think of you always as I did then.”

“But you don't believe in me now?” he said quickly.

“I do not change,” she replied.

Then, after a pause she continued :

“I do not see what good we are doing by this kind of talk : the past is gone.”

“Yes,” he said, “but listen. Since you did not read my letter, you must let me—no, it's not explanation, it's simple statement of fact, however much it tells against me. It's due to us both that I should speak. Listen to what I have to say, Linda. If I don't make my confession to you—shameful as it is—I shall never know a moment's peace.”

Linda hesitated. So there was still more pain to bear—still more shattering of ideals?

Well, she was inured to pain by that time—a little more would make small difference.

She sat down again in the window and looked at him steadily.

“Speak,” she said.

It was a long time before he spoke. Twice he stirred out of his bowed attitude and looked fixedly through the window at the moonlit garden outside. It seemed to her that he was trying to realise something. At last he looked at her—steadily.

“We’re neither of us as young as we were,” he said, in a tone that had a certain element of hardness in it. “And since that is so, we can speak to each other more as critics of the game of Life than as participators in it. I’ve got to that stage when I can analyse myself—analyse myself mercilessly. And I’m a weak man—I always was a weak man. I would give all the world if I were a thousandth part as much of a man as you are a woman !”

She made no answer.

“There’s been—no, not a curse, because that would imply something else—not a curse, but a fatal habit in me ever since I was a child,” he continued. “I don’t know how to describe it. I think—if I put it into one word—it’s

Drift. No—that's not it. It may be a form of Laziness—or Indifference. And yet, in my own particular art I have been a hard worker, and never indifferent. I do not know what it is that has always made me shirk, shift away from, get out of the way of, the stern things of Life. But I always did. Always did, from childhood. They—wearied me. And when I went away from here——”

Linda suddenly woke into activity, into realisation. She went straight to him, threw her arms round him.

“Adrian!” she said. “Don't—don't! I don't want to hear anything. It's just enough that I love you—I'm your wife. I've never cared for, never even thought of, any man but you. And—oh, I don't want any excuses, any explanations. See—I'm starving for your love. Don't say any more—just take me back into your arms—and love me!”

THE END





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